The Poetry Collection of Thomas Hardy - Volume 2

Thomas Hardy

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PREFACE

In collecting the following poems I have to thank the editors and proprietors of the periodicals in which certain of them have appeared for permission to reclaim them.

Now that the miscellany is brought together, some lack of concord in pieces written at widely severed dates, and in contrasting moods and circumstances, will be obvious enough. This I cannot help, but the sense of disconnection, particularly in respect of those lyrics penned in the first person, will be immaterial when it is borne in mind that they are to be regarded, in the main, as dramatic monologues by different characters.

As a whole they will, I hope, take the reader forward, even if not far, rather than backward. I should add that some lines in the early-dated poems have been rewritten, though they have been left substantially unchanged.

T. H.

September 1909.

THE REVISITATION

As I lay awake at night-time
In an ancient country barrack known to ancient cannoneers,
And recalled the hopes that heralded each seeming brave and bright time
Of my primal purple years,

Much it haunted me that, nigh there,
I had borne my bitterest loss — when One who went, came not again;
In a joyless hour of discord, in a joyless-hued July there -
A July just such as then.

And as thus I brooded longer,
With my faint eyes on the feeble square of wan-lit window frame,
A quick conviction sprung within me, grew, and grew yet stronger,
That the month-night was the same,

Too, as that which saw her leave me
On the rugged ridge of Waterstone, the peewits plaining round;
And a lapsing twenty years had ruled that — as it were to grieve me -
I should near the once-loved ground.

Though but now a war-worn stranger
Chance had quartered here, I rose up and descended to the yard.
All was soundless, save the troopers' horses tossing at the manger,
And the sentry keeping guard.

Through the gateway I betook me
Down the High Street and beyond the lamps, across the battered bridge,
Till the country darkness clasped me and the friendly shine forsook me,
And I bore towards the Ridge,

With a dim unowned emotion
Saying softly: “Small my reason, now at midnight, to be here . . .
Yet a sleepless swain of fifty with a brief romantic notion
May retrace a track so dear.”
Thus I walked with thoughts half-uttered
Up the lane I knew so well, the grey, gaunt, lonely Lane of Slyre;
And at whiles behind me, far at sea, a sullen thunder muttered
As I mounted high and higher.
Till, the upper roadway quitting,
I adventured on the open drouthy downland thinly grassed,
While the spry white scuts of conies flashed before me, earthward flitting,
And an arid wind went past.
Round about me bulged the barrows
As before, in antique silence — immemorial funeral piles -
Where the sleek herds trampled daily the remains of flint-tipt arrows
Mid the thyme and chamomiles;
And the Sarsen stone there, dateless,
On whose breast we had sat and told the zephyrs many a tender vow,
Held the heat of yester sun, as sank thereon one fated mateless
From those far fond hours till now.
Maybe flustered by my presence
Rose the peewits, just as all those years back, wailing soft and loud,
And revealing their pale pinions like a fitful phosphorescence
Up against the cope of cloud,
Where their dolesome exclamations
Seemed the voicings of the self-same throats I had heard when life was green,
Though since that day uncounted frail forgotten generations
Of their kind had flecked the scene. -
And so, living long and longer
In a past that lived no more, my eyes discerned there, suddenly,
That a figure broke the skyline — first in vague contour, then stronger,
And was crossing near to me.
Some long-missed familiar gesture,
Something wonted, struck me in the figure’s pause to list and heed,
Till I fancied from its handling of its loosely wrapping vesture
That it might be She indeed.
’Twas not reasonless: below there
In the vale, had been her home; the nook might hold her even yet,
And the downlands were her father’s fief; she still might come and go there;
-
So I rose, and said, “Agnette!”

With a little leap, half-frightened,
She withdrew some steps; then letting intuition smother fear
In a place so long-accustomed, and as one whom thought enlightened,
She replied: "What — THAT voice? — here!"
"Yes, Agnette! — And did the occasion
Of our marching hither make you think I MIGHT walk where we two — '
"O, I often come," she murmured with a moment's coy evasion,
"('Tis not far), — and — think of you."
Then I took her hand, and led her
To the ancient people's stone whereon I had sat. There now sat we;
And together talked, until the first reluctant shyness fled her,
And she spoke confidingly.
"It is JUST as ere we parted!"
Said she, brimming high with joy. — "And when, then, came you here, and why?"
" — Dear, I could not sleep for thinking of our trystings when twin-hearted."
She responded, "Nor could I.
"There are few things I would rather
Than be wandering at this spirit-hour — lone-lived, my kindred dead -
On this wold of well-known feature I inherit from my father:
Night or day, I have no dread . . .
"O I wonder, wonder whether
Any heartstring bore a signal-thrill between us twain or no? -
Some such influence can, at times, they say, draw severed souls together."
I said, "Dear, we'll dream it so."
Each one's hand the other's grasping,
And a mutual forgiveness won, we sank to silent thought,
A large content in us that seemed our rended lives reclasping,
And contracting years to nought.
Till I, maybe overweary
From the lateness, and a wayfaring so full of strain and stress
For one no longer buoyant, to a peak so steep and eery,
Sank to slow unconsciousness . . .
How long I slept I knew not,
But the brief warm summer night had slid when, to my swift surprise,
A red upedging sun, of glory chambered mortals view not,
Was blazing on my eyes,
From the Milton Woods to Dole-Hill
All the spacious landscape lighting, and around about my feet
Flinging tall thin tapering shadows from the meanest mound and mole-hill,
And on trails the ewes had beat.

She was sitting still beside me,
Dozing likewise; and I turned to her, to take her hanging hand;
When, the more regarding, that which like a spectre shook and tried me
In her image then I scanned;
That which Time's transforming chisel
Had been tooling night and day for twenty years, and tooled too well,
In its rendering of crease where curve was, where was raven, grizzle -
Pits, where peonies once did dwell.
She had wakened, and perceiving
(I surmise) my sigh and shock, my quite involuntary dismay,
Up she started, and — her wasted figure all throughout it heaving -
Said, "Ah, yes: I am THUS by day!
"Can you really wince and wonder
That the sunlight should reveal you such a thing of skin and bone,
As if unaware a Death's-head must of need lie not far under
Flesh whose years out-count your own?
"Yes: that movement was a warning
Of the worth of man's devotion! — Yes, Sir, I am OLD," said she,
"And the thing which should increase love turns it quickly into scorning -
And your new-won heart from me!"
Then she went, ere I could call her,
With the too proud temper ruling that had parted us before,
And I saw her form descend the slopes, and smaller grow and smaller,
Till I caught its course no more . . .
True; I might have dogged her downward;
- But it MAY be (though I know not) that this trick on us of Time
Disconcerted and confused me. — Soon I bent my footsteps townward,
Like to one who had watched a crime.
Well I knew my native weakness,
Well I know it still. I cherished her reproach like physic-wine,
For I saw in that emaciate shape of bitterness and bleakness
A nobler soul than mine.
Did I not return, then, ever? -
Did we meet again? — mend all? — Alas, what greyhead perseveres! -
Soon I got the Route elsewhither. — Since that hour I have seen her never:
Love is lame at fifty years.

A TRAMPWOMAN'S TRAGEDY (182-)

I

From Wynyard's Gap the livelong day,
The livelong day,
We beat afoot the northward way
We had travelled times before.
The sun-blaze burning on our backs,
Our shoulders sticking to our packs,
By fosseway, fields, and turnpike tracks
We skirted sad Sedge-Moor.

II

Full twenty miles we jaunted on,
We jaunted on, -
My fancy-man, and jeering John,
And Mother Lee, and I.
And, as the sun drew down to west,
We climbed the toilsome Poldon crest,
And saw, of landskip sights the best,
The inn that beamed thereby.

III

For months we had padded side by side,
Ay, side by side
Through the Great Forest, Blackmoor wide,
And where the Parret ran.
We'd faced the gusts on Mendip ridge,
Had crossed the Yeo unhelped by bridge,
Been stung by every Marshwood midge,
I and my fancy-man.

IV

Lone inns we loved, my man and I,
My man and I;
"King's Stag," "Windwhistle" high and dry,
"The Horse" on Hintock Green,
The cosy house at Wynyard's Gap,
"The Hut" renowned on Bredy Knap,
And many another wayside tap
Where folk might sit unseen.

V

Now as we trudged — O deadly day,
O deadly day! -
I teased my fancy-man in play
And wanton idleness.
I walked alongside jeering John,
I laid his hand my waist upon;
I would not bend my glances on
My lover's dark distress.

VI

Thus Poldon top at last we won,
At last we won,
And gained the inn at sink of sun
Far-famed as "Marshal's Elm."
Beneath us figured tor and lea,
From Mendip to the western sea -
I doubt if finer sight there be
Within this royal realm.

VII

Inside the settle all a-row -
All four a-row
We sat, I next to John, to show
That he had wooed and won.
And then he took me on his knee,
And swore it was his turn to be
My favoured mate, and Mother Lee
Passed to my former one.

VIII

Then in a voice I had never heard,
I had never heard,
My only Love to me: “One word,
My lady, if you please!
Whose is the child you are like to bear? -
HIS? After all my months o’ care?”
God knows ‘twas not! But, O despair!
I nodded — still to tease.

IX

Then up he sprung, and with his knife -
And with his knife
He let out jeering Johnny’s life,
Yes; there, at set of sun.
The slant ray through the window nigh
Gilded John’s blood and glazing eye,
Ere scarcely Mother Lee and I
Knew that the deed was done.

X

The taverns tell the gloomy tale,
The gloomy tale,
How that at Ivel-chester jail
My Love, my sweetheart swung;
Though stained till now by no misdeed
Save one horse ta’en in time o’ need;
(Blue Jimmy stole right many a steed
Ere his last fling he flung.)

XI

Thereaft I walked the world alone,
Alone, alone!
On his death-day I gave my groan
And dropt his dead-born child.
‘Twas nigh the jail, beneath a tree,
None tending me; for Mother Lee
Had died at Glaston, leaving me
Unfriended on the wild.

XII

And in the night as I lay weak,
As I lay weak,
The leaves a-falling on my cheek,
The red moon low declined -
The ghost of him I'd die to kiss
Rose up and said: "Ah, tell me this!
Was the child mine, or was it his?
Speak, that I rest may find!"

XIII

O doubt not but I told him then,
I told him then,
That I had kept me from all men
Since we joined lips and swore.
Whereat he smiled, and thinned away
As the wind stirred to call up day . . .
- 'Tis past! And here alone I stray
Haunting the Western Moor.

NOTES. — "Windwhistle" (Stanza iv.). The highness and dryness of Windwhistle Inn was impressed upon the writer two or three years ago, when, after climbing on a hot afternoon to the beautiful spot near which it stands and entering the inn for tea, he was informed by the landlady that none could be had, unless he would fetch water from a valley half a mile off, the house containing not a drop, owing to its situation. However, a tantalising row of full barrels behind her back testified to a wetness of a certain sort, which was not at that time desired.

"Marshal's Elm" (Stanza vi.) so picturesquely situated, is no longer an inn, though the house, or part of it, still remains. It used to exhibit a fine old swinging sign.

"Blue Jimmy" (Stanza x.) was a notorious horse-stealer of Wessex in those days, who appropriated more than a hundred horses before he was caught, among others one belonging to a neighbour of the writer's grandfather. He was hanged at the now demolished Ivel-chester or Ilchester jail above mentioned — that building formerly of so many sinister associations in the minds of the local peasantry, and the continual haunt of fever, which at last led to its condemnation. Its site is now an innocent-looking green meadow.

April 1902.

THE TWO ROSALINDS

I

The dubious daylight ended,
And I walked the Town alone, unminding whither bound and why,
As from each gaunt street and gaping square a mist of light ascended
And dispersed upon the sky.

II

Files of evanescent faces
Passed each other without heeding, in their travail, teen, or joy,
Some in void unvisioned listlessness inwrought with pallid traces
Of keen penury's annoy.

III

Nebulous flames in crystal cages
Leered as if with discontent at city movement, murk, and grime,
And as waiting some procession of great ghosts from bygone ages
To exalt the ignoble time.

IV

In a colonnade high-lighted,
By a thoroughfare where stern utilitarian traffic dinned,
On a red and white emblazonment of players and parts, I sighted
The name of "Rosalind,"

V

And her famous mates of "Arden,"
Who observed no stricter customs than "the seasons' difference" bade,
Who lived with running brooks for books in Nature's wildwood garden,
And called idleness their trade . . .

VI

Now the poster stirred an ember
Still remaining from my ardours of some forty years before,
When the selfsame portal on an eve it thrilled me to remember
A like announcement bore;

VII

And expectantly I had entered,
And had first beheld in human mould a Rosalind woo and plead,
On whose transcendent figuring my speedy soul had centred
As it had been she indeed . . .

VIII

So; all other plans discarding,
I resolved on entrance, bent on seeing what I once had seen,
And approached the gangway of my earlier knowledge, disregarding
The tract of time between.

IX

"The words, sir?" cried a creature
Hovering mid the shine and shade as 'twixt the live world and the tomb;
But the well-known numbers needed not for me a text or teacher
To revive and re-illume.

X

Then the play . . . But how unfitted
Was THIS Rosalind! — a mammet quite to me, in memories nurst,
And with chilling disappointment soon I sought the street I had quitted,
To re-ponder on the first.

XI

The hag still hawked, — I met her
Just without the colonnade. "So you don't like her, sir?" said she.
"Ah — I was once that Rosalind! — I acted her — none better -
Yes — in eighteen sixty-three.

XII

"Thus I won Orlando to me
In my then triumphant days when I had charm and maidenhood,
Now some forty years ago. — I used to say, COME WOO ME, WOO ME!"
And she struck the attitude.

XIII

It was when I had gone there nightly;
And the voice — though raucous now — was yet the old one. — Clear as noon
My Rosalind was here . . . Thereon the band withinside lightly
Beat up a merry tune.

A SUNDAY MORNING TRAGEDY (circa 186-)

I bore a daughter flower-fair,
In Pydel Vale, alas for me;
I joyed to mother one so rare,
But dead and gone I now would be.
Men looked and loved her as she grew,
And she was won, alas for me;
She told me nothing, but I knew,
And saw that sorrow was to be.
I knew that one had made her thrall,
A thrall to him, alas for me;
And then, at last, she told me all,
And wondered what her end would be.
She owned that she had loved too well,
Had loved too well, unhappy she,
And bore a secret time would tell,
Though in her shroud she'd sooner be.
I plodded to her sweetheart's door
In Pydel Vale, alas for me:
I pleaded with him, pleaded sore,
To save her from her misery.
He frowned, and swore he could not wed,
Seven times he swore it could not be;
"Poverty's worse than shame," he said,
Till all my hope went out of me.
"I've packed my traps to sail the main" -
Roughly he spake, alas did he -
"Wessex beholds me not again,
'Tis worse than any jail would be!"

- There was a shepherd whom I knew,
  A subtle man, alas for me:
  I sought him all the pastures through,
  Though better I had ceased to be.

I traced him by his lantern light,
And gave him hint, alas for me,
Of how she found her in the plight
That is so scorned in Christendie.
"Is there an herb . . . ?" I asked. "Or none?"
Yes, thus I asked him desperately.
" — There is," he said; "a certain one . . . "
Would he had sworn that none knew he!
"To-morrow I will walk your way,"
He hinted low, alas for me. -
Fieldwards I gazed throughout next day;
Now fields I never more would see!
The sunset-shine, as curfew strook,
As curfew strook beyond the lea,
Lit his white smock and gleaming crook,
While slowly he drew near to me.
He pulled from underneath his smock
The herb I sought, my curse to be -
"At times I use it in my flock,"
He said, and hope waxed strong in me.
"'Tis meant to balk ill-motherings" -
(Ill-motherings! Why should they be?) -
"If not, would God have sent such things?"
So spoke the shepherd unto me.
That night I watched the poppling brew,
With bended back and hand on knee:
I stirred it till the dawnlight grew,
And the wind whiffled wailfully.
"This scandal shall be slain," said I,
"That lours upon her innocency:
I'll give all whispering tongues the lie;" -
But worse than whispers was to be.
"Here's physic for untimely fruit,"
I said to her, alas for me,
Early that morn in fond salute;
And in my grave I now would be.

- Next Sunday came, with sweet church chimes
  In Pydel Vale, alas for me:
  I went into her room betimes;
  No more may such a Sunday be!

"Mother, instead of rescue nigh,"
She faintly breathed, alas for me,
"I feel as I were like to die,
And underground soon, soon should be."
From church that noon the people walked
In twos and threes, alas for me,
Showed their new raiment — smiled and talked,
Though sackcloth-clad I longed to be.
Came to my door her lover's friends,
And cheerly cried, alas for me,
"Right glad are we he makes amends,
For never a sweeter bride can be."
My mouth dried, as 'twere scorched within,
Dried at their words, alas for me:
More and more neighbours crowded in,
(O why should mothers ever be!)
"Ha-ha! Such well-kept news!" laughed they,
Yes — so they laughed, alas for me.
"Whose banns were called in church to-day?" -
Christ, how I wished my soul could flee!
"Where is she? O the stealthy miss,"
Still bantered they, alas for me,
"To keep a wedding close as this . . ."
Ay, Fortune worked thus wantonly!
"But you are pale — you did not know?"
They archly asked, alas for me,
I stammered, "Yes — some days-ago,"
While coffined clay I wished to be.
"'Twas done to please her, we surmise?"
(They spoke quite lightly in their glee)
"Done by him as a fond surprise?"
I thought their words would madden me.
Her lover entered. "Where's my bird? -
My bird — my flower — my picotee?
First time of asking, soon the third!"
Ah, in my grave I well may be.
To me he whispered: "Since your call — "
So spoke he then, alas for me -
"I've felt for her, and righted all."
- I think of it to agony.

"She's faint to-day — tired — nothing more — "
Thus did I lie, alas for me . . .
I called her at her chamber door
As one who scarce had strength to be.
No voice replied. I went within -
O women! scourged the worst are we . . .
I shrieked. The others hastened in
And saw the stroke there dealt on me.
There she lay — silent, breathless, dead,
Stone dead she lay — wronged, sinless she! -
Ghost-white the cheeks once rosy-red:
Death had took her. Death took not me.
I kissed her colding face and hair,
I kissed her corpse — the bride to be! -
My punishment I cannot bear,
But pray God NOT to pity me.
January 1904.

THE HOUSE OF HOSPITALITIES

Here we broached the Christmas barrel,
Pushed up the charred log-ends;
Here we sang the Christmas carol,
And called in friends.
Time has tired me since we met here
When the folk now dead were young,
Since the viands were outset here
And quaint songs sung.
And the worm has bored the viol
That used to lead the tune,
Rust eaten out the dial
That struck night's noon.
Now no Christmas brings in neighbours,
And the New Year comes unlit;
Where we sang the mole now labours,
And spiders knit.
Yet at midnight if here walking,
When the moon sheets wall and tree,
I see forms of old time talking,
Who smile on me.

BEREFT

In the black winter morning
No light will be struck near my eyes
While the clock in the stairway is warning
For five, when he used to rise.
Leave the door unbarred,
The clock unwound,
Make my lone bed hard -
Would 'twere underground!
When the summer dawns clearly,
And the appletree-tops seem alight,
Who will undraw the curtain and cheerly
Call out that the morning is bright?
When I tarry at market
No form will cross Durnover Lea
In the gathering darkness, to hark at
Grey's Bridge for the pit-pat o' me.
When the supper crock's steaming,
And the time is the time of his tread,
I shall sit by the fire and wait dreaming
In a silence as of the dead.
Leave the door unbarred,
The clock unwound,
Make my lone bed hard -
Would 'twere underground!
1901

JOHN AND JANE

I

He sees the world as a boisterous place
Where all things bear a laughing face,
And humorous scenes go hourly on,
Does John.

II

They find the world a pleasant place
Where all is ecstasy and grace,
Where a light has risen that cannot wane,
Do John and Jane.

III

They see as a palace their cottage-place,
Containing a pearl of the human race,
A hero, maybe, hereafter styled,
Do John and Jane with a baby-child.

IV

They rate the world as a gruesome place,
Where fair looks fade to a skull's grimace, -
As a pilgrimage they would fain get done -
Do John and Jane with their worthless son.

THE CURATE'S KINDNESS A WORKHOUSE IRONY

I

I thought they'd be strangers aroun' me,
But she's to be there!
Let me jump out o' waggon and go back and drown me
At Pummery or Ten-Hatches Weir.

II

I thought: "Well, I've come to the Union -
The workhouse at last -
After honest hard work all the week, and Communion
O' Zundays, these fifty years past.

III

"'Tis hard; but," I thought, "never mind it:
There's gain in the end:
And when I get used to the place I shall find it
A home, and may find there a friend.

IV

"Life there will be better than t'other.
For peace is assured.
THE MEN IN ONE WING AND THEIR WIVES IN ANOTHER
Is strictly the rule of the Board."

V

Just then one young Pa'son arriving
Steps up out of breath
To the side o' the waggon wherein we were driving
To Union; and calls out and saith:

VI

"Old folks, that harsh order is altered,
Be not sick of heart!
The Guardians they poohed and they pished and they paltered
When urged not to keep you apart.

VII

"'It is wrong,' I maintained, 'to divide them,
Near forty years wed.'
'Very well, sir. We promise, then, they shall abide them
In one wing together,' they said."

VIII

Then I sank — knew 'twas quite a foredone thing
That misery should be
To the end! . . . To get freed of her there was the one thing
Had made the change welcome to me.

IX

To go there was ending but badly;
'Twas shame and 'twas pain;
"But anyhow," thought I, "thereby I shall gladly
Get free of this forty years' chain."

X

I thought they'd be strangers aroun' me,
But she's to be there!
Let me jump out o' waggon and go back and drown me
At Pummery or Ten-Hatches Weir.

THE FLIRT'S TRAGEDY (17 —)

Here alone by the logs in my chamber,
Deserted, decrepit -
Spent flames limning ghosts on the wainscot
Of friends I once knew -
My drama and hers begins weirdly
Its dumb re-enactment,
Each scene, sigh, and circumstance passing
In spectral review.

- Wealth was mine beyond wish when I met her -
  The pride of the lowland -
  Embowered in Tintinhull Valley
  By laurel and yew;

And love lit my soul, notwithstanding
My features' ill favour,
Too obvious beside her perfections
Of line and of hue.
But it pleased her to play on my passion,
And whet me to pleadings
That won from her mirthful negations
And scornings undue.
Then I fled her disdains and derisions
To cities of pleasure,
And made me the crony of idlers
In every purlieu.
Of those who lent ear to my story,
A needy Adonis
Gave hint how to grizzle her garden
From roses to rue,
Could his price but be paid for so purging
My scorner of scornings:
Thus tempted, the lust to avenge me
Germed inly and grew.

I clothed him in sumptuous apparel,
Consigned to him coursers,
Meet equipage, liveried attendants
In full retinue.
So dowered, with letters of credit
He wayfared to England,
And spied out the manor she goddessed,
And handy thereto,
Set to hire him a tenantless mansion
As coign-stone of vantage
For testing what gross adulation
Of beauty could do.
He laboured through mornings and evens,
On new moons and sabbaths,
By wiles to enmesh her attention
In park, path, and pew;
And having afar played upon her,
Advanced his lines nearer,
And boldly outleaping conventions,
Bent briskly to woo.
His gay godlike face, his rare seeming
Anon worked to win her,
And later, at noontides and night-tides
They held rendezvous.
His tarriance full spent, he departed
And met me in Venice,
And lines from her told that my jilter
Was stooping to sue.
Not long could be further concealment,
She pled to him humbly:
"By our love and our sin, O protect me;
I fly unto you!"
A mighty remorse overgat me,
I heard her low anguish,
And there in the gloom of the calle
My steel ran him through.
A swift push engulphed his hot carrion
Within the canal there -
That still street of waters dividing
The city in two.

- I wandered awhile all unable
  To smother my torment,
  My brain racked by yells as from Tophet
  Of Satan's whole crew.

A month of unrest brought me hovering
At home in her precincts,
To whose hiding-hole local story
Afforded a clue.
Exposed, and expelled by her people,
Afar off in London
I found her alone, in a sombre
And soul-stifling mew.
Still burning to make reparation
I pleaded to wive her,
And father her child, and thus faintly
My mischief undo.
She yielded, and spells of calm weather
Succeeded the tempest;
And one sprung of him stood as scion
Of my bone and thew . . .
But Time unveils sorrows and secrets,
And so it befell now:
By inches the curtain was twitched at,
And slowly undrew.
As we lay, she and I, in the night-time,
We heard the boy moaning:
"O misery mine! My false father
Has murdered my true!"
She gasped: yea, she heard; understood it.
Next day the child fled us;
And nevermore sighted was even
A print of his shoe.
Thenceforward she shunned me, and languished;
Till one day the park-pool
Embraced her fair form, and extinguished
Her eyes' living blue.

- So; ask not what blast may account for
  This aspect of pallor,
  These bones that just prison within them
  Life's poor residue;

But pass by, and leave unregarded
A Cain to his suffering,
For vengeance too dark on the woman
Whose lover he slew.

THE REJECTED MEMBER'S WIFE

We shall see her no more
On the balcony,
Smiling, while hurt, at the roar
As of surging sea
From the stormy sturdy band
Who have doomed her lord's cause,
Though she waves her little hand
As it were applause.
Here will be candidates yet,
And candidates' wives,
Fervid with zeal to set
Their ideals on our lives:
Here will come market-men
On the market-days,
Here will clash now and then
More such party assays.
And the balcony will fill
When such times are renewed,
And the throng in the street will thrill
With to-day's mettled mood;
But she will no more stand
In the sunshine there,
With that wave of her white-gloved hand,
And that chestnut hair.
January 1906.

THE FARM-WOMAN'S WINTER

I

If seasons all were summers,
And leaves would never fall,
And hopping casement-comers
Were foodless not at all,
And fragile folk might be here
That white winds bid depart;
Then one I used to see here
Would warm my wasted heart!

II

One frail, who, bravely tilling
Long hours in gripping gusts,
Was mastered by their chilling,
And now his ploughshare rusts.
So savage winter catches
The breath of limber things,
And what I love he snatches,
And what I love not, brings.

AUTUMN IN KING'S HINTOCK PARK

Here by the baring bough
Raking up leaves,
Often I ponder how
Springtime deceives, -
I, an old woman now,
Raking up leaves.
Here in the avenue
Raking up leaves,
Lords' ladies pass in view,
Until one heaves
Sighs at life's russet hue,
Raking up leaves!

Just as my shape you see
Raking up leaves,
I saw, when fresh and free,
Those memory weaves
Into grey ghosts by me,
Raking up leaves.
Yet, Dear, though one may sigh,
Raking up leaves,
New leaves will dance on high -
Earth never grieves! -
Will not, when missed am I
Raking up leaves.
1901

SHUT OUT THAT MOON

Close up the casement, draw the blind,
Shut out that stealing moon,
She wears too much the guise she wore
Before our lutes were strewn
With years-deep dust, and names we read
On a white stone were hewn.
Step not out on the dew-dashed lawn
To view the Lady's Chair,
Immense Orion's glittering form,
The Less and Greater Bear:
Stay in; to such sights we were drawn
When faded ones were fair.
Brush not the bough for midnight scents
That come forth lingeringly,
And wake the same sweet sentiments
They breathed to you and me
When living seemed a laugh, and love
All it was said to be.
Within the common lamp-lit room
Prison my eyes and thought;
Let dingy details crudely loom,
Mechanic speech be wrought:
Too fragrant was Life's early bloom,
Too tart the fruit it brought!
1904

REMINISCENCES OF A DANCING MAN

I

Who now remembers Almack's balls -
Willis's sometime named -
In those two smooth-floored upper halls
For faded ones so famed?
Where as we trod to trilling sound
The fancied phantoms stood around,
Or joined us in the maze,
Of the powdered Dears from Georgian years,
Whose dust lay in sightless sealed-up biers,
The fairest of former days.

II

Who now remembers gay Cremorne,
And all its jaunty jills,
And those wild whirling figures born
Of Jullien's grand quadrilles?
With hats on head and morning coats
There footed to his prancing notes
Our partner-girls and we;
And the gas-jets winked, and the lustres clinked,
And the platform throbbed as with arms enlinked
We moved to the minstrelsy.

III

Who now recalls those crowded rooms
Of old yclept "The Argyle,"
Where to the deep Drum-polka's booms
We hopped in standard style?
Whither have danced those damsels now!
Is Death the partner who doth moue
Their wormy chaps and bare?
Do their spectres spin like sparks within
The smoky halls of the Prince of Sin
To a thunderous Jullien air?

THE DEAD MAN WALKING

They hail me as one living,
But don't they know
That I have died of late years,
Untombed although?
I am but a shape that stands here,
A pulseless mould,
A pale past picture, screening
Ashes gone cold.
Not at a minute's warning,
Not in a loud hour,
For me ceased Time's enchantments
In hall and bower.
There was no tragic transit,
No catch of breath,
When silent seasons inched me
On to this death . . .

- A Troubadour-youth I rambled
  With Life for lyre,
  The beats of being raging
  In me like fire.

But when I practised eyeing
The goal of men,
It iced me, and I perished
A little then.
When passed my friend, my kinsfolk
Through the Last Door,
And left me standing bleakly,
I died yet more;
And when my Love's heart kindled
In hate of me,
Wherefore I knew not, died I
One more degree.
And if when I died fully
I cannot say,
And changed into the corpse-thing
I am to-day;

Yet is it that, though whiling
The time somehow
In walking, talking, smiling,
I live not now.

MORE LOVE LYRICS

1967

In five-score summers! All new eyes,
New minds, new modes, new fools, new wise;
New woes to weep, new joys to prize;
With nothing left of me and you
In that live century's vivid view
Beyond a pinch of dust or two;
A century which, if not sublime,
Will show, I doubt not, at its prime,
A scope above this blinkered time.

- Yet what to me how far above?
  For I would only ask thereof
  That thy worm should be my worm, Love!

16 WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS, 1867.

HER DEFINITION

I lingered through the night to break of day,
Nor once did sleep extend a wing to me,
Intently busied with a vast array
Of epithets that should outfigure thee.
Full-featured terms — all fitless — hastened by,
And this sole speech remained: "That maiden mine!" -
Debarred from due description then did I
Perceive the indefinite phrase could yet define.
As common chests encasing wares of price
Are borne with tenderness through halls of state,
For what they cover, so the poor device
Of homely wording I could tolerate,
Knowing its unadornment held as freight
The sweetest image outside Paradise.
W. P. V.,
Summer 1866.

THE DIVISION

Rain on the windows, creaking doors,
With blasts that besom the green,
And I am here, and you are there,
And a hundred miles between!

O were it but the weather, Dear,
O were it but the miles
That summed up all our severance,
There might be room for smiles.

But that thwart thing betwixt us twain,
Which nothing cleaves or clears,
Is more than distance, Dear, or rain,
And longer than the years!

1893

ON THE DEPARTURE PLATFORM

We kissed at the barrier; and passing through
She left me, and moment by moment got
Smaller and smaller, until to my view
She was but a spot;

A wee white spot of muslin fluff
That down the diminishing platform bore
Through hustling crowds of gentle and rough
To the carriage door.

Under the lamplight's fitful glowers,
Behind dark groups from far and near,
Whose interests were apart from ours,
She would disappear,

Then show again, till I ceased to see
That flexible form, that nebulous white;
And she who was more than my life to me
Had vanished quite . . .

We have penned new plans since that fair fond day,
And in season she will appear again -
Perhaps in the same soft white array -
But never as then!

• "And why, young man, must eternally fly
A joy you'll repeat, if you love her well?"
— O friend, nought happens twice thus; why,
I cannot tell!

IN A CATHEDRAL CITY

These people have not heard your name;
No loungers in this placid place
Have helped to bruit your beauty's fame.
The grey Cathedral, towards whose face
Bend eyes untold, has met not yours;
Your shade has never swept its base,
Your form has never darked its doors,
Nor have your faultless feet once thrown
A pensive pit-pat on its floors.
Along the street to maids well known
Blithe lovers hum their tender airs,
But in your praise voice not a tone.

• Since nought bespeaks you here, or bears,
As I, your imprint through and through,
Here might I rest, till my heart shares
The spot's unconsciousness of you!

SALISBURY.

I SAY I'LL SEEK HER

I say, "I'll seek her side
Ere hindrance interposes;"
But eve in midnight closes,
And here I still abide.
When darkness wears I see
Her sad eyes in a vision;
They ask, "What indecision
Detains you, Love, from me? -
"The creaking hinge is oiled,
I have unbarred the backway,
But you tread not the trackway;
And shall the thing be spoiled?

"Far cockcrows echo shrill,
The shadows are abating,
And I am waiting, waiting;
But O, you tarry still!"

HER FATHER

I met her, as we had privily planned,
Where passing feet beat busily:
She whispered: "Father is at hand!
He wished to walk with me."
His presence as he joined us there
Banished our words of warmth away;
We felt, with cloudings of despair,
What Love must lose that day.
Her crimson lips remained unkissed,
Our fingers kept no tender hold,
His lack of feeling made the tryst
Embarrassed, stiff, and cold.
A cynic ghost then rose and said,
"But is his love for her so small
That, nigh to yours, it may be read
As of no worth at all?
"You love her for her pink and white;
But what when their fresh splendours close?
His love will last her in despite
Of Time, and wrack, and foes."
WEYMOUTH.

AT WAKING

When night was lifting,
And dawn had crept under its shade,
Amid cold clouds drifting
Dead-white as a corpse outlaid,
With a sudden scare
I seemed to behold
My Love in bare
Hard lines unfold.

Yea, in a moment,
An insight that would not die
Killed her old endowment
Of charm that had capped all nigh,
Which vanished to none
Like the gilt of a cloud,
And showed her but one
Of the common crowd.
She seemed but a sample
Of earth's poor average kind,
Lit up by no ample
Enrichments of mien or mind.
I covered my eyes
As to cover the thought,
And unrecognize
What the morn had taught.
O vision appalling
When the one believed-in thing
Is seen falling, falling,
With all to which hope can cling.
Off: it is not true;
For it cannot be
That the prize I drew
Is a blank to me!
WEYMOUTH, 1869.

FOUR FOOTPRINTS

Here are the tracks upon the sand
Where stood last evening she and I -
Pressed heart to heart and hand to hand;
The morning sun has baked them dry.
I kissed her wet face — wet with rain,
For arid grief had burnt up tears,
While reached us as in sleeping pain
The distant gurgling of the weirs.
"I have married him — yes; feel that ring;
'Tis a week ago that he put it on . . .
A dutiful daughter does this thing,
And resignation succeeds anon!

"But that I body and soul was yours
Ere he'd possession, he'll never know.
He's a confident man. 'The husband scores,'
He says, 'in the long run' . . . Now, Dear, go!"
I went. And to-day I pass the spot;
It is only a smart the more to endure;
And she whom I held is as though she were not,
For they have resumed their honeymoon tour.

IN THE VAULTED WAY

In the vaulted way, where the passage turned
To the shadowy corner that none could see,
You paused for our parting, — plaintively;
Though overnight had come words that burned
My fond frail happiness out of me.
And then I kissed you, — despite my thought
That our spell must end when reflection came
On what you had deemed me, whose one long aim
Had been to serve you; that what I sought
Lay not in a heart that could breathe such blame.
But yet I kissed you; whereon you again
As of old kissed me. Why, why was it so?
Do you cleave to me after that light-tongued blow?
If you scorned me at eventide, how love then?
The thing is dark, Dear. I do not know.

IN THE MIND'S EYE

That was once her casement,
And the taper nigh,
Shining from within there,
Beckoned, "Here am I!"
Now, as then, I see her
Moving at the pane;
Ah; 'tis but her phantom
Borne within my brain! -

Foremost in my vision
Everywhere goes she;
Change dissolves the landscapes,
She abides with me.
Shape so sweet and shy, Dear,
Who can say thee nay?
Never once do I, Dear,
Wish thy ghost away.

THE END OF THE EPISODE

Indulge no more may we
In this sweet-bitter pastime:
The love-light shines the last time
Between you, Dear, and me.
There shall remain no trace
Of what so closely tied us,
And blank as ere love eyed us
Will be our meeting-place.
The flowers and thymy air,
Will they now miss our coming?
The dumbles thin their humming
To find we haunt not there?
Though fervent was our vow,
Though ruddily ran our pleasure,
Bliss has fulfilled its measure,
And sees its sentence now.
Ache deep; but make no moans:
Smile out; but stilly suffer:
The paths of love are rougher
Than thoroughfares of stones.

THE SIGH

Little head against my shoulder,
Shy at first, then somewhat bolder,
And up-eyed;
Till she, with a timid quaver,
Yielded to the kiss I gave her;
But, she sighed.

That there mingled with her feeling
Some sad thought she was concealing
It implied.
- Not that she had ceased to love me,
None on earth she set above me;
But she sighed.
She could not disguise a passion,
Dread, or doubt, in weakest fashion
If she tried:
Nothing seemed to hold us sundered,
Hearts were victors; so I wondered
Why she sighed.
Afterwards I knew her throughly,
And she loved me staunchly, truly,
Till she died;
But she never made confession
Why, at that first sweet concession,
She had sighed.
It was in our May, remember;
And though now I near November,
And abide
Till my appointed change, unfretting,
Sometimes I sit half regretting
That she sighed.

IN THE NIGHT SHE CAME

I told her when I left one day
That whatsoever weight of care
Might strain our love, Time's mere assault
Would work no changes there.
And in the night she came to me,
Toothless, and wan, and old,
With leaden concaves round her eyes,
And wrinkles manifold.

I tremblingly exclaimed to her,
"O wherefore do you ghost me thus!
I have said that dull defacing Time
Will bring no dreads to us."
"And is that true of YOU?" she cried
In voice of troubled tune.
I faltered: "Well . . . I did not think
You would test me quite so soon!"
She vanished with a curious smile,
Which told me, plainlier than by word,
That my staunch pledge could scarce beguile
The fear she had averred.
Her doubts then wrought their shape in me,
And when next day I paid
My due caress, we seemed to be
Divided by some shade.

THE CONFORMERS

Yes; we'll wed, my little fay,
And you shall write you mine,
And in a villa chastely gray
We'll house, and sleep, and dine.
But those night-screened, divine,
Stolen trysts of heretofore,
We of choice ecstasies and fine
Shall know no more.
The formal faced cohue
Will then no more upbraid
With smiting smiles and whisperings two
Who have thrown less loves in shade.
We shall no more evade
The searching light of the sun,
Our game of passion will be played,
Our dreaming done.

We shall not go in stealth
To rendezvous unknown,
But friends will ask me of your health,
And you about my own.
When we abide alone,
No leapings each to each,
But syllables in frigid tone
Of household speech.

When down to dust we glide
Men will not say askance,
As now: "How all the country side
Rings with their mad romance!"
But as they graveward glance
Remark: "In them we lose
A worthy pair, who helped advance
Sound parish views."

THE DAWN AFTER THE DANCE

Here is your parents' dwelling with its curtained windows telling
Of no thought of us within it or of our arrival here;
Their slumbers have been normal after one day more of formal
Matrimonial commonplace and household life's mechanic gear.

I would be candid willingly, but dawn draws on so chillingly
As to render further cheerlessness intolerable now,
So I will not stand endeavouring to declare a day for severing,
But will clasp you just as always — just the olden love avow.

Through serene and surly weather we have walked the ways together,
And this long night's dance this year's end eve now finishes the spell;
Yet we dreamt us but beginning a sweet sempiternal spinning
Of a cord we have spun to breaking — too intemperately, too well.

Yes; last night we danced I know, Dear, as we did that year ago, Dear,
When a new strange bond between our days was formed, and felt, and heard;
Would that dancing were the worst thing from the latest to the first thing
That the faded year can charge us with; but what avails a word!

That which makes man's love the lighter and the woman's burn no brighter
Came to pass with us inevitably while slipped the shortening year . . .
And there stands your father's dwelling with its blind bleak windows telling
That the vows of man and maid are frail as filmy gossamere.

WEYMOUTH, 1869.

THE SUN ON THE LETTER

I drew the letter out, while gleamed
The sloping sun from under a roof
Of cloud whose verge rose visibly.
The burning ball flung rays that seemed
Stretched like a warp without a woof
Across the levels of the lea
To where I stood, and where they beamed
As brightly on the page of proof
That she had shown her false to me
As if it had shown her true — had teemed
With passionate thought for my behoof
Expressed with their own ardency!

THE NIGHT OF THE DANCE

The cold moon hangs to the sky by its horn,
And centres its gaze on me;
The stars, like eyes in reverie,
Their westering as for a while forborne,
Quiz downward curiously.
Old Robert draws the backbrand in,
The green logs steam and spit;
The half-awakened sparrows flit
From the riddled thatch; and owls begin
To whoo from the gable-slit.
Yes; far and nigh things seem to know
Sweet scenes are impending here;
That all is prepared; that the hour is near
For welcomes, fellowships, and flow
Of sally, song, and cheer;
That spigots are pulled and viols strung;
That soon will arise the sound
Of measures trod to tunes renowned;
That She will return in Love's low tongue
My vows as we wheel around.

MISCONCEPTION

I busied myself to find a sure
Snug hermitage
That should preserve my Love secure
From the world's rage;
Where no unseemly saturnals,
Or strident traffic-roars,
Or hum of intervolved cabals
Should echo at her doors.
I laboured that the diurnal spin
Of vanities
Should not contrive to suck her in
By dark degrees,
And cunningly operate to blur
Sweet teachings I had begun;
And then I went full-heart to her
To expound the glad deeds done.
She looked at me, and said thereto
With a pitying smile,
"And THIS is what has busied you
So long a while?
O poor exhausted one, I see
You have worn you old and thin
For naught! Those moils you fear for me
I find most pleasure in!"

THE VOICE OF THE THORN

I

When the thorn on the down
Quivers naked and cold,
And the mid-aged and old
Pace the path there to town,
In these words dry and drear
It seems to them sighing:
"O winter is trying
To sojourners here!"

II

When it stands fully tressed
On a hot summer day,
And the ewes there astray
Find its shade a sweet rest,
By the breath of the breeze
It inquires of each farer:
"Who would not be sharer
Of shadow with these?"

III

But by day or by night,
And in winter or summer,
Should I be the comer
Along that lone height,
In its voicing to me
Only one speech is spoken:
"Here once was nigh broken
A heart, and by thee."

FROM HER IN THE COUNTRY

I thought and thought of thy crass clanging town
To folly, till convinced such dreams were ill,
I held my heart in bond, and tethered down
Fancy to where I was, by force of will.
I said: How beautiful are these flowers, this wood,
One little bud is far more sweet to me
Than all man's urban shows; and then I stood
Urging new zest for bird, and bush, and tree;
And strove to feel my nature brought it forth
Of instinct, or no rural maid was I;
But it was vain; for I could not see worth
Enough around to charm a midge or fly,
And mused again on city din and sin,
Longing to madness I might move therein!
16 W. P. V., 1866.

HER CONFESSION

As some bland soul, to whom a debtor says
"I'll now repay the amount I owe to you,"
In inward gladness feigns forgetfulness
That such a payment ever was his due
(His long thought notwithstanding), so did I
At our last meeting waive your proffered kiss
With quick divergent talk of scenery nigh,
By such suspension to enhance my bliss.
And as his looks in consternation fall
When, gathering that the debt is lightly deemed,
The debtor makes as not to pay at all,
So faltered I, when your intention seemed
Converted by my false uneagerness
To putting off for ever the caress.
W. P. V., 1865-67.

TO AN IMPERSONATOR OF ROSALIND

Did he who drew her in the years ago -
Till now conceived creator of her grace -
With telescopic sight high natures know,
Discern remote in Time's untravelled space
Your soft sweet mien, your gestures, as do we,
And with a copyist's hand but set them down,
Glowing yet more to dream our ecstasy
When his Original should be forthshown?
For, kindled by that animated eye,
Whereto all fairnesses about thee brim,
And by thy tender tones, what wight can fly
The wild conviction welling up in him
That he at length beholds woo, parley, plead,
The "very, very Rosalind" indeed!
8 ADELPHI TERRACE, 21st April 1867.

TO AN ACTRESS

I read your name when you were strange to me,
Where it stood blazoned bold with many more;
I passed it vacantly, and did not see
Any great glory in the shape it wore.
O cruelty, the insight barred me then!
Why did I not possess me with its sound,
And in its cadence catch and catch again
Your nature's essence floating therearound?
Could THAT man be this I, unknowing you,
When now the knowing you is all of me,
And the old world of then is now a new,
And purpose no more what it used to be -
A thing of formal journeywork, but due
To springs that then were sealed up utterly?
1867

THE MINUTE BEFORE MEETING

The grey gaunt days dividing us in twain
Seemed hopeless hills my strength must faint to climb,
But they are gone; and now I would detain
The few clock-beats that part us; rein back Time,
And live in close expectance never closed
In change for far expectance closed at last,
So harshly has expectance been imposed
On my long need while these slow blank months passed.
And knowing that what is now about to be
Will all HAVE BEEN in O, so short a space!
I read beyond it my despondency
When more dividing months shall take its place,
Thereby denying to this hour of grace
A full-up measure of felicity.
1871

HE ABJURES LOVE

At last I put off love,
For twice ten years
The daysman of my thought,
And hope, and doing;
Being ashamed thereof,
And faint of fears
And desolations, wrought
In his pursuing,
Since first in youthtime those
Disquietings
That heart-enslavement brings
To hale and hoary,
Became my housefellows,
And, fool and blind,
I turned from kith and kind
To give him glory.
I was as children be
Who have no care;
I did not shrink or sigh,
I did not sicken;
But lo, Love beckoned me,
And I was bare,
And poor, and starved, and dry,
And fever-stricken.
Too many times ablaze
With fatuous fires,
Enkindled by his wiles
To new embraces,
Did I, by wilful ways
And baseless ires,
Return the anxious smiles
Of friendly faces.
No more will now rate I
The common rare,
The midnight drizzle dew,
The gray hour golden,
The wind a yearning cry,
The faulty fair,
Things dreamt, of comelier hue
Than things beholden! . . .

— I speak as one who plumbs
Life's dim profound,
One who at length can sound
Clear views and certain.
But — after love what comes?
A scene that lours,
A few sad vacant hours,
And then, the Curtain.
1883

A SET OF COUNTRY SONGS

LET ME ENJOY (MINOR KEY)

I

Let me enjoy the earth no less
Because the all-enacting Might
That fashioned forth its loveliness
Had other aims than my delight.

II

About my path there flits a Fair,
Who throws me not a word or sign;
I'll charm me with her ignoring air,
And laud the lips not meant for mine.

III

From manuscripts of moving song
Inspired by scenes and dreams unknown
I'll pour out raptures that belong
To others, as they were my own.

IV

And some day hence, towards Paradise,
And all its blest — if such should be -
I will lift glad, afar-off eyes,
Though it contain no place for me.

AT CASTERBRIDGE FAIR

I

THE BALLAD-SINGER
Sing, Ballad-singer, raise a hearty tune;
Make me forget that there was ever a one
I walked with in the meek light of the moon
When the day's work was done.
Rhyme, Ballad-rhymer, start a country song;
Make me forget that she whom I loved well
Swore she would love me dearly, love me long,
Then — what I cannot tell!
Sing, Ballad-singer, from your little book;
Make me forget those heart-breaks, achings, fears;
Make me forget her name, her sweet sweet look -
Make me forget her tears.

II

FORMER BEAUTIES
These market-dames, mid-aged, with lips thin-drawn,
And tissues sere,
Are they the ones we loved in years agone,
And courted here?
Are these the muslined pink young things to whom
We vowed and swore
In nooks on summer Sundays by the Froom,
Or Budmouth shore?
Do they remember those gay tunes we trod
Clasped on the green;
Aye; trod till moonlight set on the beaten sod
A satin sheen?
They must forget, forget! They cannot know
What once they were,
Or memory would transfigure them, and show
Them always fair.

III

AFTER THE CLUB-DANCE

Black'on frowns east on Maidon,
And westward to the sea,
But on neither is his frown laden
With scorn, as his frown on me!
At dawn my heart grew heavy,
I could not sip the wine,
I left the jocund bevy
And that young man o' mine.
The roadside elms pass by me, -
Why do I sink with shame
When the birds a-perch there eye me?
They, too, have done the same!

IV

THE MARKET-GIRL

Nobody took any notice of her as she stood on the causey kerb,
All eager to sell her honey and apples and bunches of garden herb;
And if she had offered to give her wares and herself with them too that day,
I doubt if a soul would have cared to take a bargain so choice away.

But chancing to trace her sunburnt grace that morning as I passed nigh,
I went and I said "Poor maidy dear! — and will none of the people buy?"
And so it began; and soon we knew what the end of it all must be,
And I found that though no others had bid, a prize had been won by me.

V

THE INQUIRY

And are ye one of Hermitage -
Of Hermitage, by Ivel Road,
And do ye know, in Hermitage
A thatch-roofed house where sengreens grow?
And does John Waywood live there still -
He of the name that there abode
When father hurdled on the hill
Some fifteen years ago?

Does he now speak o' Patty Beech,
The Patty Beech he used to — see,
Or ask at all if Patty Beech
Is known or heard of out this way?
- Ask ever if she's living yet,
And where her present home may be,
And how she bears life's fag and fret
After so long a day?
In years agone at Hermitage
This faded face was counted fair,
None fairer; and at Hermitage
We swore to wed when he should thrive.
But never a chance had he or I,
And waiting made his wish outwear,
And Time, that dooms man's love to die,
Preserves a maid's alive.

VI

A WIFE WAITS

Will's at the dance in the Club-room below,
Where the tall liquor-cups foam;
I on the pavement up here by the Bow,
Wait, wait, to steady him home.
Will and his partner are treading a tune,
Loving companions they be;
Willy, before we were married in June,
Said he loved no one but me;
Said he would let his old pleasures all go
Ever to live with his Dear.
Will's at the dance in the Club-room below,
Shivering I wait for him here.

NOTE. — "The Bow" (line 3). The old name for the curved corner by the cross - streets in the middle of Casterbridge.

VII

AFTER THE FAIR

The singers are gone from the Cornmarket-place
With their broadsheets of rhymes,
The street rings no longer in treble and bass
With their skits on the times,
And the Cross, lately thronged, is a dim naked space
That but echoes the stammering chimes.

From Clock-corner steps, as each quarter ding-dongs,
Away the folk roam
By the "Hart" and Grey's Bridge into byways and "drongs,"
Or across the ridged loam;
The younger ones shrilling the lately heard songs,
The old saying, "Would we were home."
The shy-seeming maiden so mute in the fair
Now rattles and talks,
And that one who looked the most swaggering there
Grows sad as she walks,
And she who seemed eaten by cankering care
In statuesque sturdiness stalks.
And midnight clears High Street of all but the ghosts
Of its buried burghees,
From the latest far back to those old Roman hosts
Whose remains one yet sees,
Who loved, laughed, and fought, hailed their friends, drank their toasts
At their meeting-times here, just as these!
1902
NOTE. — "The Chimes" (line 6) will be listened for in vain here at midnight now, having been abolished some years ago.

THE DARK-EYED GENTLEMAN

I

I pitched my day's leazings in Crimmercrock Lane,
To tie up my garter and jog on again,
When a dear dark-eyed gentleman passed there and said,
In a way that made all o' me colour rose-red,
"What do I see -
O pretty knee!"
And he came and he tied up my garter for me.

II

'Twixt sunset and moonrise it was, I can mind:
Ah, 'tis easy to lose what we nevermore find! -
Of the dear stranger's home, of his name, I knew nought,
But I soon knew his nature and all that it brought.
Then bitterly
Sobbed I that he
Should ever have tied up my garter for me!

III

Yet now I've beside me a fine lissom lad,
And my slip's nigh forgot, and my days are not sad;
My own dearest joy is he, comrade, and friend,
He it is who safe-guards me, on him I depend;
No sorrow brings he,
And thankful I be
That his daddy once tied up my garter for me!

NOTE. — "Leazings" (line 1). — Bundle of gleaned corn.

TO CARREY CLAVEL

You turn your back, you turn your back,
And never your face to me,
Alone you take your homeward track,
And scorn my company.

What will you do when Charley's seen
Dewbeating down this way?
- You'll turn your back as now, you mean?
Nay, Carrey Clavel, nay!

You'll see none's looking; put your lip
Up like a tulip, so;
And he will coll you, bend, and sip:
Yes, Carrey, yes; I know!

THE ORPHANED OLD MAID

I wanted to marry, but father said, "No -
'Tis weakness in women to give themselves so;
If you care for your freedom you'll listen to me,
Make a spouse in your pocket, and let the men be."
I spake on't again and again: father cried,
"Why — if you go husbanding, where shall I bide?
For never a home's for me elsewhere than here!"
And I yielded; for father had ever been dear.
But now father's gone, and I feel growing old,
And I'm lonely and poor in this house on the wold,
And my sweetheart that was found a partner elsewhere,
And nobody flings me a thought or a care.

THE SPRING CALL

Down Wessex way, when spring's a-shine,
The blackbird's "pret-ty de-urr!"
In Wessex accents marked as mine
Is heard afar and near.
He flutes it strong, as if in song
No R's of feebler tone
Than his appear in "pretty dear,"
Have blackbirds ever known.
Yet they pipe "prattie deerh!" I glean,
Beneath a Scottish sky,
And "pehty de-aw!" amid the treen
Of Middlesex or nigh.
While some folk say — perhaps in play -
Who know the Irish isle,
'Tis "purrity dare!" in treeland there
When songsters would beguile.
Well: I'll say what the listening birds
Say, hearing "pret-ty de-urr!" -
However strangers sound such words,
That's how we sound them here.
Yes, in this clime at pairing time,
As soon as eyes can see her
At dawn of day, the proper way
To call is "pret-ty de-urr!"

JULIE-JANE

Sing; how ‘a would sing!
How ‘a would raise the tune
When we rode in the waggon from harvesting
By the light o’ the moon!
Dance; how ‘a would dance!
If a fiddlestring did but sound
She would hold out her coats, give a slanting glance,
And go round and round.
Laugh; how ‘a would laugh!
Her peony lips would part
As if none such a place for a lover to quaff
At the deeps of a heart.
Julie, O girl of joy,
Soon, soon that lover he came.
Ah, yes; and gave thee a baby-boy,
But never his name . . .
— Tolling for her, as you guess;
And the baby too . . . ‘Tis well.
You knew her in maidhood likewise? — Yes,
That’s her burial bell.
”I suppose,” with a laugh, she said,
”I should blush that I’m not a wife;
But how can it matter, so soon to be dead,
What one does in life!”
When we sat making the mourning
By her death-bed side, said she,
“Dears, how can you keep from your lovers, adorning
In honour of me!”
Bubbling and brightsome eyed!
But now — O never again.
She chose her bearers before she died
From her fancy-men.

NOTE. — It is, or was, a common custom in Wessex, and probably other country places, to prepare the mourning beside the death-bed, the dying person sometimes assisting, who also selects his or her bearers on such occasions.

“Coats” (line 7). — Old name for petticoats.

NEWS FOR HER MOTHER

I

One mile more is
Where your door is
Mother mine! -
Harvest's coming,
Mills are strumming,
Apples fine,
And the cider made to-year will be as wine.

II

Yet, not viewing
What's a-doing
Here around
Is it thrills me,
And so fills me
That I bound
Like a ball or leaf or lamb along the ground.

III

Tremble not now
At your lot now,
Silly soul!
Hosts have sped them
Quick to wed them,
Great and small,
Since the first two sighing half-hearts made a whole.

IV

Yet I wonder,
Will it sunder
Her from me?
Will she guess that
I said "Yes," — that
His I'd be,
Ere I thought she might not see him as I see!

V

Old brown gable,
Granary, stable,
Here you are!
O my mother,
Can another
Ever bar
Mine from thy heart, make thy nearness seem afar?

THE FIDDLER

The fiddler knows what's brewing
To the lilt of his lyric wiles:
The fiddler knows what rueing
Will come of this night's smiles!
He sees couples join them for dancing,
And afterwards joining for life,
He sees them pay high for their prancing
By a welter of wedded strife.
He twangs: "Music hails from the devil,
Though vaunted to come from heaven,
For it makes people do at a revel
What multiplies sins by seven.
"There's many a heart now mangled,
And waiting its time to go,
Whose tendrils were first entangled
By my sweet viol and bow!"

THE HUSBAND'S VIEW

"Can anything avail
Beldame, for my hid grief? -
Listen: I'll tell the tale,
It may bring faint relief! -
"I came where I was not known,
In hope to flee my sin;
And walking forth alone
A young man said, 'Good e'en.'

"In gentle voice and true
He asked to marry me;
'You only — only you
Fulfil my dream!' said he.
"We married o' Monday morn,
In the month of hay and flowers;
My cares were nigh forsworn,
And perfect love was ours.
"But ere the days are long
Untimely fruit will show;
My Love keeps up his song,
Undreaming it is so.
"And I awake in the night,
And think of months gone by,
And of that cause of flight
Hidden from my Love's eye.
"Discovery borders near,
And then! . . . But something stirred? -
My husband — he is here!
Heaven — has he overheard?" -
"Yes; I have heard, sweet Nan;
I have known it all the time.
I am not a particular man;
Misfortunes are no crime:
"And what with our serious need
Of sons for soldiering,
That accident, indeed,
To maids, is a useful thing!"

ROSE-ANN

Why didn't you say you was promised, Rose-Ann?
Why didn't you name it to me,
Ere ever you tempted me hither, Rose-Ann,
So often, so wearifully?
O why did you let me be near 'ee, Rose-Ann,
Talking things about wedlock so free,
And never by nod or by whisper, Rose-Ann,
Give a hint that it wasn't to be?

Down home I was raising a flock of stock ewes,
Cocks and hens, and wee chickens by scores,
And lavendered linen all ready to use,
A-dreaming that they would be yours.
Mother said: "She's a sport-making maiden, my son";
And a pretty sharp quarrel had we;
O why do you prove by this wrong you have done
That I saw not what mother could see?
Never once did you say you was promised, Rose-Ann,
Never once did I dream it to be;
And it cuts to the heart to be treated, Rose-Ann,
As you in your scorning treat me!

THE HOMECOMING

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller downland broad and bare,
And lonesome was the house, and dark; and few came there.
"Now don't ye rub your eyes so red; we're home and have no cares;
Here's a skimmer-cake for supper, peckled onions, and some pears;
I've got a little keg o' summat strong, too, under stairs:
- What, slight your husband's victuals? Other brides can tackle theirs!"
The wind of winter mooed and mouthed their chimney like a horn,
And round the house and past the house 'twas leafless and lorn.
"But my dear and tender poppet, then, how came ye to agree
In Ivel church this morning? Sure, there-right you married me!"
- "Hoo-hoo! — I don't know — I forgot how strange and far 'twould be,
An' I wish I was at home again with dear daddee!"
Gruffly growled the wind on Toller downland broad and bare,
And lonesome was the house and dark; and few came there.
"I didn't think such furniture as this was all you'd own,
And great black beams for ceiling, and a floor o' wretched stone,
And nasty pewter platters, horrid forks of steel and bone,
And a monstrous crock in chimney. 'Twas to me quite unbeknown!"
Rattle rattle went the door; down flapped a cloud of smoke,
As shifting north the wicked wind assayed a smarter stroke.
"Now sit ye by the fire, poppet; put yourself at ease:
And keep your little thumb out of your mouth, dear, please!
And I'll sing to 'ee a pretty song of lovely flowers and bees,
And happy lovers taking walks within a grove o' trees."
Gruffly growled the wind on Toller Down, so bleak and bare,
And lonesome was the house, and dark; and few came there.

"Now, don't ye gnaw your handkercher; 'twill hurt your little tongue,
And if you do feel spitish, 'tis because ye are over young;
But you'll be getting older, like us all, ere very long,
And you'll see me as I am — a man who never did 'ee wrong."

Straight from Whit'sheet Hill to Benvill Lane the blusters pass,
Hitting hedges, milestones, handposts, trees, and tufts of grass.

"Well, had I only known, my dear, that this was how you'd be,
I'd have married her of riper years that was so fond of me.
But since I can't, I've half a mind to run away to sea,
And leave 'ee to go barefoot to your d-d daddee!"

Up one wall and down the other — past each window-pane -
Prance the gusts, and then away down Crimmercrock's long lane.

"I — I — don't know what to say to't, since your wife I've vowed to be;
And as 'tis done, I s'pose here I must bide — poor me!
Aye — as you are ki-ki-kind, I'll try to live along with 'ee,
Although I'd fain have stayed at home with dear daddee!"

Gruffly growled the wind on Toller Down, so bleak and bare,
And lonesome was the house and dark; and few came there.

"That's right, my Heart! And though on haunted Toller Down we be,
And the wind swears things in chimley, we'll to supper merrily!
So don't ye tap your shoe so pettish-like; but smile at me,
And ye'll soon forget to sock and sigh for dear daddee!"

December 1901.

PIECES OCCASIONAL AND VARIOUS

A CHURCH ROMANCE

(MELLSTOCK circa 1835)

She turned in the high pew, until her sight
Swept the west gallery, and caught its row
Of music-men with viol, book, and bow
Against the sinking sad tower-window light.

She turned again; and in her pride's despite
One strenuous viol's inspirer seemed to throw
A message from his string to her below,
Which said: "I claim thee as my own forthright!"

Thus their hearts' bond began, in due time signed.
And long years thence, when Age had scared Romance,
At some old attitude of his or glance
That gallery-scene would break upon her mind,
With him as minstrel, ardent, young, and trim,
Bowing "New Sabbath" or "Mount Ephraim."

THE RASH BRIDE AN EXPERIENCE OF THE MELLSTOCK QUIRE

I

We Christmas-carolled down the Vale, and up the Vale, and round the Vale,
We played and sang that night as we were yearly wont to do -
A carol in a minor key, a carol in the major D,
Then at each house: "Good wishes: many Christmas joys to you!"

II

Next, to the widow's John and I and all the rest drew on. And I
Discerned that John could hardly hold the tongue of him for joy.
The widow was a sweet young thing whom John was bent on marrying,
And quiring at her casement seemed romantic to the boy.

III

"She'll make reply, I trust," said he, "to our salute? She must!" said he,
"And then I will accost her gently — much to her surprise! -
For knowing not I am with you here, when I speak up and call her dear
A tenderness will fill her voice, a bashfulness her eyes.

IV

So, by her window-square we stood; ay, with our lanterns there we stood,
And he along with us, — not singing, waiting for a sign;
And when we'd quired her carols three a light was lit and out looked she,
A shawl about her bedgown, and her colour red as wine.

V

And sweetly then she bowed her thanks, and smiled, and spoke aloud her thanks;
When lo, behind her back there, in the room, a man appeared.
I knew him — one from Woolcomb way — Giles Swetman — honest as the day,
But eager, hasty; and I felt that some strange trouble neared.

VI

"How comes he there? . . . Suppose," said we, "she's wed of late! Who knows?" said we.
- "She married yester-morning — only mother yet has known
The secret o't!" shrilled one small boy. "But now I've told, let's wish 'em joy!"
A heavy fall aroused us: John had gone down like a stone.

VII

We rushed to him and caught him round, and lifted him, and brought him round,
When, hearing something wrong had happened, oped the window she:
"Has one of you fallen ill?" she asked, "by these night labours overtasked?"
None answered. That she'd done poor John a cruel turn felt we.

VIII

Till up spoke Michael: "Fie, young dame! You've broke your promise, sly young dame,
By forming this new tie, young dame, and jilting John so true,
Who trudged to-night to sing to 'ee because he thought he'd bring to 'ee
Good wishes as your coming spouse. May ye such trifling rue!"

IX

Her man had said no word at all; but being behind had heard it all,
And now cried: "Neighbours, on my soul I knew not 'twas like this!"
And then to her: "If I had known you'd had in tow not me alone,
No wife should you have been of mine. It is a dear bought bliss!"

X

She changed death-white, and heaved a cry: we'd never heard so grieved a cry
As came from her at this from him: heart-broken quite seemed she;
And suddenly, as we looked on, she turned, and rushed; and she was gone,
Whither, her husband, following after, knew not; nor knew we.

XI

We searched till dawn about the house; within the house, without the house,
We searched among the laurel boughs that grew beneath the wall,
And then among the crocks and things, and stores for winter junketings,
In linhay, loft, and dairy; but we found her not at all.

XII

Then John rushed in: "O friends," he said, "hear this, this, this!" and bends his head:
"I've — searched round by the — WELL, and find the cover open wide!
I am fearful that — I can't say what . . . Bring lanterns, and some cords to knot."
We did so, and we went and stood the deep dark hole beside.

XIII

And then they, ropes in hand, and I — ay, John, and all the band, and I
Let down a lantern to the depths — some hundred feet and more;
It glimmered like a fog-dimmed star; and there, beside its light, afar,
White drapery floated, and we knew the meaning that it bore.

XIV

The rest is naught . . . We buried her o' Sunday. Neighbours carried her;
And Swetman — he who'd married her — now miserablest of men,
Walked mourning first; and then walked John; just quivering, but composed anon;
And we the quire formed round the grave, as was the custom then.

XV

Our old bass player, as I recall — his white hair blown — but why recall! -
His viol upstrapped, bent figure — doomed to follow her full soon -
Stood bowing, pale and tremulous; and next to him the rest of us . . .
We sang the Ninetieth Psalm to her — set to Saint Stephen's tune.

THE DEAD QUIRE

I

Beside the Mead of Memories,
Where Church-way mounts to Moaning Hill,
The sad man sighed his phantasies:
He seems to sigh them still.

II

"'Twas the Birth-tide Eve, and the hamleteers
Made merry with ancient Mellstock zest,
But the Mellstock quire of former years
Had entered into rest.

III

"Old Dewy lay by the gaunt yew tree,
And Reuben and Michael a pace behind,
And Bowman with his family
By the wall that the ivies bind.

IV

"The singers had followed one by one,
Treble, and tenor, and thorough-bass;
And the worm that wasteth had begun
To mine their mouldering place.

V

"For two-score years, ere Christ-day light,
Mellstock had throbbed to strains from these;
But now there echoed on the night
No Christmas harmonies.

VI

"Three meadows off, at a dormered inn,
The youth had gathered in high carouse,
And, ranged on settles, some therein
Had drunk them to a drowse.

VII

"Loud, lively, reckless, some had grown,
Each dandling on his jigging knee
Eliza, Dolly, Nance, or Joan -
Livers in levity.

VIII

"The taper flames and hearthfire shine
Grew smoke-hazed to a lurid light,
And songs on subjects not divine
Were warbled forth that night.

IX

"Yet many were sons and grandsons here
Of those who, on such eves gone by,
At that still hour had throated clear
Their anthems to the sky.

X

"The clock belled midnight; and ere long
One shouted, 'Now 'tis Christmas morn;
Here's to our women old and young,
And to John Barleycorn!'

XI

"They drink the toast and shout again:
The pewter-ware rings back the boom,
And for a breath-while follows then
A silence in the room.

XII

"When nigh without, as in old days,
The ancient quire of voice and string
Seemed singing words of prayer and praise
As they had used to sing:

XIII

"'While shepherds watch'd their flocks by night,' -
Thus swells the long familiar sound
In many a quaint symphonic flight -
To, 'Glory shone around.'

XIV

"The sons defined their fathers' tones,
The widow his whom she had wed,
And others in the minor moans
The viols of the dead.

XV

"Something supernal has the sound
As verse by verse the strain proceeds,
And stilly staring on the ground
Each roysterer holds and heeds.

XVI

"Towards its chorded closing bar
Plaintively, thinly, waned the hymn,
Yet lingered, like the notes afar
Of banded seraphim.

XVII

"With brows abashed, and reverent tread,
The hearkeners sought the tavern door:
But nothing, save wan moonlight, spread
The empty highway o'er.

XVIII

"While on their hearing fixed and tense
The aerial music seemed to sink,
As it were gently moving thence
Along the river brink.

XIX

"Then did the Quick pursue the Dead
By crystal Froom that crinkles there;
And still the viewless quire ahead
Voiced the old holy air.

XX

"By Bank-walk wicket, brightly bleached,
It passed, and 'twixt the hedges twain,
Dogged by the living; till it reached
The bottom of Church Lane.

XXI

"There, at the turning, it was heard
Drawing to where the churchyard lay:
But when they followed thitherward
It smalled, and died away.

XXII

"Each headstone of the quire, each mound,
Confronted them beneath the moon;
But no more floated therearound
That ancient Birth-night tune.

XXIII

"There Dewy lay by the gaunt yew tree,
There Reuben and Michael, a pace behind,
And Bowman with his family
By the wall that the ivies bind . . .

XXIV

"As from a dream each sobered son
Awoke, and musing reached his door:
'Twas said that of them all, not one
Sat in a tavern more."

XXV

- The sad man ceased; and ceased to heed
  His listener, and crossed the leaze
  From Moaning Hill towards the mead -
  The Mead of Memories.

1897

THE CHRISTENING

Whose child is this they bring
Into the aisle? -
At so superb a thing
The congregation smile
And turn their heads awhile.
Its eyes are blue and bright,
Its cheeks like rose;
Its simple robes unite
Whitest of calicoes
With lawn, and satin bows.
A pride in the human race
At this paragon
Of mortals, lights each face
While the old rite goes on;
But ah, they are shocked anon.
What girl is she who peeps
From the gallery stair,
Smiles palely, redly weeps,
With feverish furtive air
As though not fitly there?
"I am the baby's mother;
This gem of the race
The decent fain would smother,
And for my deep disgrace
I am bidden to leave the place."
"Where is the baby's father?" -
"In the woods afar.
He says there is none he'd rather
Meet under moon or star
Than me, of all that are.

"To clasp me in lovelike weather,
Wish fixing when,
He says: To be together
At will, just now and then,
Makes him the blest of men;
"But chained and doomed for life
To slovening
As vulgar man and wife,
He says, is another thing:
Yea: sweet Love's sepulchring!"
1904

A DREAM QUESTION

"It shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine."
Micah iii. 6.

I asked the Lord: "Sire, is this true
Which hosts of theologians hold,
That when we creatures censure you
For shaping griefs and ails untold
(Deeming them punishments undue)
You rage, as Moses wrote of old?
When we exclaim: 'Beneficent
He is not, for he orders pain,
Or, if so, not omnipotent:
To a mere child the thing is plain!'
Those who profess to represent
You, cry out: 'Impious and profane!'"
He: "Save me from my friends, who deem
That I care what my creatures say!
Mouth as you list: sneer, rail, blaspheme,
O manikin, the livelong day,
Not one grief-groan or pleasure-gleam
Will you increase or take away.
"Why things are thus, whoso derides,
May well remain my secret still . . .
A fourth dimension, say the guides,
To matter is conceivable.
Think some such mystery resides
Within the ethic of my will."

BY THE BARROWS

Not far from Mellstock — so tradition saith -
Where barrows, bulging as they bosoms were
Of Multimammia stretched supinely there,
Catch night and noon the tempest's wanton breath,
A battle, desperate doubtless unto death,
Was one time fought. The outlook, lone and bare,
The towering hawk and passing raven share,
And all the upland round is called "The He'th."
Here once a woman, in our modern age,
Fought singlehandedly to shield a child -
One not her own — from a man's senseless rage.
And to my mind no patriots' bones there piled
So consecrate the silence as her deed
Of stoic and devoted self-unheed.

A WIFE AND ANOTHER

"War ends, and he's returning
Early; yea,
The evening next to-morrow's!" -
— This I say
To her, whom I suspiciously survey,
Holding my husband's letter
To her view. -
She glanced at it but lightly,
And I knew
That one from him that day had reached her too.
There was no time for scruple;
Secretly
I filched her missive, conned it,
Learnt that he
Would lodge with her ere he came home to me.
To reach the port before her,
And, unscanned,
There wait to intercept them
Soon I planned:
That, in her stead, I might before him stand.

So purposed, so effected;
At the inn
Assigned, I found her hidden:-
O that sin
Should bear what she bore when I entered in!
Her heavy lids grew laden
With despairs,
Her lips made soundless movements
Unawares,
While I peered at the chamber hired as theirs.
And as beside its doorway,
Deadly hued,
One inside, one withoutside
We two stood,
He came — my husband — as she knew he would.
No pleasurable triumph
Was that sight!
The ghastly disappointment
Broke them quite.
What love was theirs, to move them with such might!
"Madam, forgive me!" said she,
Sorrow bent,
"A child — I soon shall bear him . . .
Yes — I meant
To tell you — that he won me ere he went."
Then, as it were, within me
Something snapped,
As if my soul had largened:
Conscience-capped,
I saw myself the snarer — them the trapped.
"My hate dies, and I promise,
Grace-beguiled,"
I said, "to care for you, be
Reconciled;
And cherish, and take interest in the child."
Without more words I pressed him
Through the door
Within which she stood, powerless
To say more,
And closed it on them, and downstairward bore.

"He joins his wife — my sister,"
I, below,
Remarked in going — lightly -
Even as though
All had come right, and we had arranged it so . . .
As I, my road retracing,
Left them free,
The night alone embracing
Childless me,
I held I had not stirred God wrothfully.

THE ROMAN ROAD

The Roman Road runs straight and bare
As the pale parting-line in hair
Across the heath. And thoughtful men
Contrast its days of Now and Then,
And delve, and measure, and compare;
Visioning on the vacant air
Helmed legionaries, who proudly rear
The Eagle, as they pace again
The Roman Road.
But no tall brass-helmed legionnaire
Haunts it for me. Uprises there
A mother's form upon my ken,
Guiding my infant steps, as when
We walked that ancient thoroughfare,
The Roman Road.

THE VAMPIRINE FAIR

Gilbert had sailed to India's shore,
And I was all alone:
My lord came in at my open door
And said, "O fairest one!"
He leant upon the slant bureau,
And sighed, "I am sick for thee!"
"My lord," said I, "pray speak not so,
Since wedded wife I be."

Leaning upon the slant bureau,
Bitter his next words came:
"So much I know; and likewise know
My love burns on the same!
"But since you thrust my love away,
And since it knows no cure,
I must live out as best I may
The ache that I endure."
When Michaelmas browned the nether Coomb,
And Wingreen Hill above,
And made the hollyhocks rags of bloom,
My lord grew ill of love.
My lord grew ill with love for me;
Gilbert was far from port;
And — so it was — that time did see
Me housed at Manor Court.
About the bowers of Manor Court
The primrose pushed its head
When, on a day at last, report
Arrived of him I had wed.
"Gilbert, my lord, is homeward bound,
His sloop is drawing near,
What shall I do when I am found
Not in his house but here?"
"O I will heal the injuries
I've done to him and thee.
I'll give him means to live at ease
Afar from Shastonb'ry."
When Gilbert came we both took thought:
"Since comfort and good cheer,"
Said he, "So readily are bought,
He's welcome to thee, Dear."
So when my lord flung liberally
His gold in Gilbert's hands,
I coaxed and got my brothers three
Made stewards of his lands.
And then I coaxed him to install
My other kith and kin,
With aim to benefit them all
Before his love ran thin.

And next I craved to be possessed
Of plate and jewels rare.
He groaned: “You give me, Love, no rest,
Take all the law will spare!”
And so in course of years my wealth
Became a goodly hoard,
My steward brethren, too, by stealth
Had each a fortune stored.
Thereafter in the gloom he’d walk,
And by and by began
To say aloud in absent talk,
”I am a ruined man! -
“I hardly could have thought,” he said,
”When first I looked on thee,
That one so soft, so rosy red,
Could thus have beggared me!”
Seeing his fair estates in pawn,
And him in such decline,
I knew that his domain had gone
To lift up me and mine.
Next month upon a Sunday morn
A gunshot sounded nigh:
By his own hand my lordly born
Had doomed himself to die.
“Live, my dear lord, and much of thine
Shall be restored to thee!”
He smiled, and said ‘twixt word and sign,
”Alas — that cannot be!”
And while I searched his cabinet
For letters, keys, or will,
‘Twas touching that his gaze was set
With love upon me still.
And when I burnt each document
Before his dying eyes,
‘Twas sweet that he did not resent
My fear of compromise.
The steeple-cock gleamed golden when
I watched his spirit go:
And I became repentant then
That I had wrecked him so.

Three weeks at least had come and gone,
With many a saddened word,
Before I wrote to Gilbert on
The stroke that so had stirred.
And having worn a mournful gown,
I joined, in decent while,
My husband at a dashing town
To live in dashing style.
Yet though I now enjoy my fling,
And dine and dance and drive,
I'd give my prettiest emerald ring
To see my lord alive.
And when the meet on hunting-days
Is near his churchyard home,
I leave my bantering beaux to place
A flower upon his tomb;
And sometimes say: "Perhaps too late
The saints in Heaven deplore
That tender time when, moved by Fate,
He darked my cottage door."

THE REMINDER

I

While I watch the Christmas blaze
Paint the room with ruddy rays,
Something makes my vision glide
To the frosty scene outside.
There, to reach a rotting berry,
Toils a thrush, — constrained to very
Dregs of food by sharp distress,
Taking such with thankfulness.
Why, O starving bird, when I
One day's joy would justify,
And put misery out of view,
Do you make me notice you!

THE RAMBLER

I do not see the hills around,
Nor mark the tints the copses wear;
I do not note the grassy ground
And constellated daisies there.
I hear not the contralto note
Of cuckoos hid on either hand,
The whirr that shakes the nighthawk's throat
When eve's brown awning hoods the land.
Some say each songster, tree, and mead -
All eloquent of love divine -
Receives their constant careful heed:
Such keen appraisement is not mine.
The tones around me that I hear,
The aspects, meanings, shapes I see,
Are those far back ones missed when near,
And now perceived too late by me!

NIGHT IN THE OLD HOME

When the wasting embers redden the chimney-breast,
And Life's bare pathway looms like a desert track to me,
And from hall and parlour the living have gone to their rest,
My perished people who housed them here come back to me.
They come and seat them around in their mouldy places,
Now and then bending towards me a glance of wistfulness,
A strange upbraiding smile upon all their faces,
And in the bearing of each a passive tristfulness.
"Do you uphold me, lingering and languishing here,
A pale late plant of your once strong stock?" I say to them;
"A thinker of crooked thoughts upon Life in the sere,
And on That which consigns men to night after showing the day to them?"
" — O let be the Wherefore! We fevered our years not thus:
Take of Life what it grants, without question!" they answer me seemingly.
"Enjoy, suffer, wait: spread the table here freely like us,
And, satisfied, placid, unfretting, watch Time away beamingly!"

AFTER THE LAST BREATH (J. H. 1813-1904)

There's no more to be done, or feared, or hoped;
None now need watch, speak low, and list, and tire;
No irksome crease outsmoothed, no pillow sloped
Does she require.

Blankly we gaze. We are free to go or stay;
Our morrow's anxious plans have missed their aim;
Whether we leave to-night or wait till day
Counts as the same.

The lettered vessels of medicaments
Seem asking wherefore we have set them here;
Each palliative its silly face presents
As useless gear.

And yet we feel that something savours well;
We note a numb relief withheld before;
Our well-beloved is prisoner in the cell
Of Time no more.

We see by littles now the deft achievement
Whereby she has escaped the Wrongers all,
In view of which our momentary bereavement
Outshapes but small.

1904

IN CHILDBED

In the middle of the night
Mother's spirit came and spoke to me,
Looking weariful and white -
As 'twere untimely news she broke to me.

"O my daughter, joyed are you
To own the weetless child you mother there;
'Men may search the wide world through,'
You think, 'nor find so fair another there!'

"Dear, this midnight time unwombs
Thousands just as rare and beautiful;
Thousands whom High Heaven foredooms
To be as bright, as good, as dutiful.

"Source of ecstatic hopes and fears
And innocent maternal vanity,
Your fond exploit but shapes for tears
New thoroughfares in sad humanity.
"Yet as you dream, so dreamt I
When Life stretched forth its morning ray to me;
Other views for by and by!" . . .
Such strange things did mother say to me.

THE PINE PLANTERS (MARTY SOUTH'S REVERIE)

I

We work here together
In blast and breeze;
He fills the earth in,
I hold the trees.
He does not notice
That what I do
Keeps me from moving
And chills me through.
He has seen one fairer
I feel by his eye,
Which skims me as though
I were not by.
And since she passed here
He scarce has known
But that the woodland
Holds him alone.
I have worked here with him
Since morning shine,
He busy with his thoughts
And I with mine.
I have helped him so many,
So many days,
But never win any
Small word of praise!

Shall I not sigh to him
That I work on
Glad to be nigh to him
Though hope is gone?
Nay, though he never
Knew love like mine,
I'll bear it ever
And make no sign!

II

From the bundle at hand here
I take each tree,
And set it to stand, here
Always to be;
When, in a second,
As if from fear
Of Life unreckoned
Beginning here,
It starts a sighing
Through day and night,
Though while there lying
'Twas voiceless quite.
It will sigh in the morning,
Will sigh at noon,
At the winter's warning,
In wafts of June;
Grieving that never
Kind Fate decreed
It should for ever
Remain a seed,
And shun the welter
Of things without,
Unneeding shelter
From storm and drought.

Thus, all unknowing
For whom or what
We set it growing
In this bleak spot,
It still will grieve here
Throughout its time,
Unable to leave here,
Or change its clime;
Or tell the story
Of us to-day
When, halt and hoary,
We pass away.

THE DEAR

I plodded to Fairmile Hill-top, where
A maiden one fain would guard
From every hazard and every care
Advanced on the roadside sward.
I wondered how succeeding suns
Would shape her wayfarings,
And wished some Power might take such ones
Under Its warding wings.
The busy breeze came up the hill
And smartened her cheek to red,
And frizzled her hair to a haze. With a will
"Good-morning, my Dear!" I said.
She glanced from me to the far-off gray,
And, with proud severity,
"Good-morning to you — though I may say
I am not YOUR Dear," quoth she:
"For I am the Dear of one not here -
One far from his native land!" -
And she passed me by; and I did not try
To make her understand.
1901

ONE WE KNEW (M. H. 1772-1857)

She told how they used to form for the country dances -
"The Triumph," "The New-rigged Ship" -
To the light of the guttering wax in the panelled manses,
And in cots to the blink of a dip.

She spoke of the wild "poussetting" and "allemanding"
On carpet, on oak, and on sod;
And the two long rows of ladies and gentlemen standing,
And the figures the couples trod.

She showed us the spot where the maypole was yearly planted,
And where the bandsmen stood
While breeched and kerchiefed partners whirled, and panted
To choose each other for good.

She told of that far-back day when they learnt astounded
Of the death of the King of France:
Of the Terror; and then of Bonaparte's unbounded
Ambition and arrogance.

Of how his threats woke warlike preparations
Along the southern strand,
And how each night brought tremors and trepidations
Lest morning should see him land.

She said she had often heard the gibbet creaking
As it swayed in the lightning flash,
Had caught from the neighbouring town a small child's shrieking
At the cart-tail under the lash . . .

With cap-framed face and long gaze into the embers -
We seated around her knees -
She would dwell on such dead themes, not as one who remembers,
But rather as one who sees.

She seemed one left behind of a band gone distant
So far that no tongue could hail:
Past things retold were to her as things existent,
Things present but as a tale.

May 20, 1902.

SHE HEARS THE STORM

There was a time in former years -
While my roof-tree was his -
When I should have been distressed by fears
At such a night as this!
I should have murmured anxiously,
"The pricking rain strikes cold;
His road is bare of hedge or tree,
And he is getting old."
But now the fitful chimney-roar,
The drone of Thorncombe trees,
The Froom in flood upon the moor,
The mud of Mellstock Leaze,
The candle slanting sooty wick'd,
The thuds upon the thatch,
The eaves-drops on the window flicked,
The clacking garden-hatch,
And what they mean to wayfarers,
I scarcely heed or mind;
He has won that storm-tight roof of hers
Which Earth grants all her kind.

A WET NIGHT

I pace along, the rain-shafts riddling me,
Mile after mile out by the moorland way,
And up the hill, and through the ewe-leaze gray
Into the lane, and round the corner tree;
Where, as my clothing clams me, mire-bestarred,
And the enfeebled light dies out of day,
Leaving the liquid shades to reign, I say,
"This is a hardship to be calendared!"
Yet sires of mine now perished and forgot,
When worse beset, ere roads were shapen here,
And night and storm were foes indeed to fear,
Times numberless have trudged across this spot
In sturdy muteness on their strenuous lot,
And taking all such toils as trifles mere.

BEFORE LIFE AND AFTER

A time there was — as one may guess
And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell -
Before the birth of consciousness,
When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings;
None cared whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung;
If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong;
Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
How long, how long?

NEW YEAR'S EVE

"I have finished another year," said God,
"In grey, green, white, and brown;
I have strewn the leaf upon the sod,
Sealed up the worm within the clod,
And let the last sun down."

"And what's the good of it?" I said.
"What reasons made you call
From formless void this earth we tread,
When nine-and-ninety can be read
Why nought should be at all?

"Yea, Sire; why shaped you us, 'who in
This tabernacle groan' -
If ever a joy be found herein,
Such joy no man had wished to win
If he had never known!"

Then he: "My labours — logicless -
You may explain; not I:
Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
That I evolved a Consciousness
To ask for reasons why.

"Strange that ephemeral creatures who
By my own ordering are,
Should see the shortness of my view,
Use ethic tests I never knew,
Or made provision for!"
He sank to raptness as of yore,
And opening New Year's Day
Wove it by rote as theretofore,
And went on working evermore
In his unweeting way.
1906

GOD'S EDUCATION

I saw him steal the light away
That haunted in her eye:
It went so gently none could say
More than that it was there one day
And missing by-and-by.
I watched her longer, and he stole
Her lily tincts and rose;
All her young sprightliness of soul
Next fell beneath his cold control,
And disappeared like those.
I asked: "Why do you serve her so?
Do you, for some glad day,
Hoard these her sweets — ?" He said, "O no,
They charm not me; I bid Time throw
Them carelessly away."
Said I: "We call that cruelty -
We, your poor mortal kind."
He mused. "The thought is new to me.
Forsooth, though I men's master be,
Theirs is the teaching mind!"

TO SINCERITY

O sweet sincerity! -
Where modern methods be
What scope for thine and thee?

Life may be sad past saying,
Its greens for ever graying,
Its faiths to dust decaying;
And youth may have foreknown it,
And riper seasons shown it,
But custom cries: "Disown it:
"Say ye rejoice, though grieving,
Believe, while unbelieving,
Behold, without perceiving!"

- Yet, would men look at true things,
  And unilluded view things,
  And count to bear undue things,

The real might mend the seeming,
Facts better their foredeeming,
And Life its disesteeming.
February 1899.

PANTHERA

(For other forms of this legend — first met with in the second century — see Origen contra Celsum; the Talmud; Sepher Toldoth Jeschu; quoted fragments of lost Apocryphal gospels; Strauss, Haeckel; etc.)

Yea, as I sit here, crutched, and cricked, and bent,
I think of Panthera, who underwent
Much from insidious aches in his decline;
But his aches were not radical like mine;
They were the twinges of old wounds — the feel
Of the hand he had lost, shorn by barbarian steel,
Which came back, so he said, at a change in the air,
Fingers and all, as if it still were there.
My pains are otherwise: upclosing cramps
And stiffened tendons from this country's damps,
Where Panthera was never commandant. -
The Fates sent him by way of the Levant.
He had been blithe in his young manhood's time,
And as centurion carried well his prime.
In Ethiop, Araby, climes fair and fell,
He had seen service and had borne him well.
Nought shook him then: he was serene as brave;
Yet later knew some shocks, and would grow grave
When pondering them; shocks less of corporal kind
Than phantom-like, that disarranged his mind;
And it was in the way of warning me
(By much his junior) against levity
That he recounted them; and one in chief
Panthera loved to set in bold relief.
This was a tragedy of his Eastern days,
Personal in touch — though I have sometimes thought
That touch a possible delusion — wrought
Of half-conviction carried to a craze -
His mind at last being stressed by ails and age:-
Yet his good faith thereon I well could wage.

I had said it long had been a wish with me
That I might leave a scion — some small tree
As channel for my sap, if not my name -
Ay, offspring even of no legitimate claim,
In whose advance I secretly could joy.
Thereat he warned.
"Cancel such wishes, boy!
A son may be a comfort or a curse,
A seer, a doer, a coward, a fool; yea, worse -
A criminal . . . That I could testify!"
"Panthera has no guilty son!" cried I
All unbelieving. "Friend, you do not know,"
He darkly dropt: "True, I've none now to show,
For THE LAW TOOK HIM. Ay, in sooth, Jove shaped it so!"
"This noon is not unlike," he again began,
"The noon these pricking memories print on me -
Yea, that day, when the sun grew copper-red,
And I served in Judaea . . . 'Twas a date
Of rest for arms. The Pax Romana ruled,
To the chagrin of frontier legionaries!
Palestine was annexed — though sullen yet, -
I, being in age some two-score years and ten
And having the garrison in Jerusalem
Part in my hands as acting officer
Under the Governor. A tedious time
I found it, of routine, amid a folk
Restless, contentless, and irascible. -
Quelling some riot, sentrying court and hall,
Sending men forth on public meeting-days
To maintain order, were my duties there.

"Then came a morn in spring, and the cheerful sun
Whitened the city and the hills around,
And every mountain-road that clambered them,
Tincturing the greyness of the olives warm,
And the rank cacti round the valley's sides.
The day was one whereon death-penalties
Were put in force, and here and there were set
The soldiery for order, as I said,
Since one of the condemned had raised some heat,
And crowds surged passionately to see him slain.
I, mounted on a Cappadocian horse,
With some half-company of auxiliaries,
Had captained the procession through the streets
When it came streaming from the judgment-hall
After the verdicts of the Governor.
It drew to the great gate of the northern way
That bears towards Damascus; and to a knoll
Upon the common, just beyond the walls -
Whence could be swept a wide horizon round
Over the housetops to the remotest heights.
Here was the public execution-ground
For city crimes, called then and doubtless now
Golgotha, Kranion, or Calvaria.
"The usual dooms were duly meted out;
Some three or four were stript, transfixed, and nailed,
And no great stir occurred. A day of wont
It was to me, so far, and would have slid
Clean from my memory at its squalid close
But for an incident that followed these.
"Among the tag-rag rabble of either sex
That hung around the wretches as they writhed,
Till thrust back by our spears, one held my eye -
A weeping woman, whose strained countenance,
Sharpened against a looming livid cloud,
Was mocked by the crude rays of afternoon -
The mother of one of those who suffered there
I had heard her called when spoken roughly to
By my ranged men for pressing forward so.
It stole upon me hers was a face I knew;
Yet when, or how, I had known it, for a while
Eluded me. And then at once it came.

”Some thirty years or more before that noon
I was sub-captain of a company
Drawn from the legion of Calabria,
That marched up from Judaea north to Tyre.
We had pierced the old flat country of Jezreel,
The great Esdraelon Plain and fighting-floor
Of Jew with Canaanite, and with the host
Of Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, met
While crossing there to strike the Assyrian pride.
We left behind Gilboa; passed by Nain;
Till bulging Tabor rose, embossed to the top
With arbute, terabinth, and locust growths.
”Encumbering me were sundry sick, so fallen
Through drinking from a swamp beside the way;
But we pressed on, till, bearing over a ridge,
We dipt into a world of pleasantness -
A vale, the fairest I had gazed upon -
Which lapped a village on its furthest slopes
Called Nazareth, brimmed round by uplands nigh.
In the midst thereof a fountain bubbled, where,
Lime-dry from marching, our glad halt we made
To rest our sick ones, and refresh us all.
”Here a day onward, towards the eventide,
Our men were piping to a Pyrrhic dance
Trod by their comrades, when the young women came
To fill their pitchers, as their custom was.
I proffered help to one — a slim girl, coy
Even as a fawn, meek, and as innocent.
Her long blue gown, the string of silver coins
That hung down by her banded beautiful hair,
Symboled in full immaculate modesty.
”Well, I was young, and hot, and readily stirred
To quick desire. ‘Twas tedious timing out
The convalescence of the soldiery;
And I beguiled the long and empty days
By blissful yieldance to her sweet allure,
Who had no arts, but what out-arted all,
The tremulous tender charm of trustfulness.
We met, and met, and under the winking stars
That passed which peoples earth — true union, yea,
To the pure eye of her simplicity.

"Meanwhile the sick found health; and we pricked on.
I made her no rash promise of return,
As some do use; I was sincere in that;
I said we sundered never to meet again -
And yet I spoke untruth unknowingly! -
For meet again we did. Now, guess you aught?
The weeping mother on Calvaria
Was she I had known — albeit that time and tears
Had wasted rudely her once flowerlike form,
And her soft eyes, now swollen with sorrowing.
"Though I betrayed some qualms, she marked me not;
And I was scarce of mood to comrade her
And close the silence of so wide a time
To claim a malefactor as my son -
(For so I guessed him). And inquiry made
Brought rumour how at Nazareth long before
An old man wedded her for pity's sake
On finding she had grown pregnant, none knew how,
Cared for her child, and loved her till he died.
"Well; there it ended; save that then I learnt
That he — the man whose ardent blood was mine -
Had waked sedition long among the Jews,
And hurled insulting parlance at their god,
Whose temple bulked upon the adjoining hill,
Vowing that he would raze it, that himself
Was god as great as he whom they adored,
And by descent, moreover, was their king;
With sundry other incitements to misrule.
"The impalements done, and done the soldiers' game
Of raffling for the clothes, a legionary,
Longinus, pierced the young man with his lance
At signs from me, moved by his agonies
Through naysaying the drug they had offered him.
It brought the end. And when he had breathed his last
The woman went. I saw her never again . . .
Now glares my moody meaning on you, friend? -
That when you talk of offspring as sheer joy
So trustingly, you blink contingencies.
Fors Fortuna! He who goes fathering
Gives frightful hostages to hazardry!"

Thus Panthera's tale. 'Twas one he seldom told,
But yet it got abroad. He would unfold,
At other times, a story of less gloom,
Though his was not a heart where jests had room.
He would regret discovery of the truth
Was made too late to influence to ruth
The Procurator who had condemned his son —
Or rather him so deemed. For there was none
To prove that Panthera erred not: and indeed,
When vagueness of identity I would plead,
Panther himself would sometimes own as much -
Yet lothly. But, assuming fact was such,
That the said woman did not recognize
Her lover's face, is matter for surprise.
However, there's his tale, fantasy or otherwise.
Thereafter shone not men of Panthera's kind:
The indolent heads at home were ill-inclined
To press campaigning that would hoist the star
Of their lieutenants valorous afar.
Jealousies kept him irked abroad, controlled
And stinted by an Empire no more bold.
Yet in some actions southward he had share -
In Mauretania and Numidia; there
With eagle eye, and sword and steed and spur,
Quelling uprisings promptly. Some small stir
In Parthia next engaged him, until maimed,
As I have said; and cynic Time proclaimed
His noble spirit broken. What a waste
Of such a Roman! — one in youth-time graced
With indescribable charm, so I have heard,
Yea, magnetism impossible to word
When faltering as I saw him. What a fame,
O Son of Saturn, had adorned his name,
Might the Three so have urged Thee! — Hour by hour
His own disorders hampered Panthera's power
To brood upon the fate of those he had known,
Even of that one he always called his own -
Either in morbid dream or memory . . .
He died at no great age, untroublously,
An exit rare for ardent soldiers such as he.

THE UNBORN

I rose at night, and visited
The Cave of the Unborn:
And crowding shapes surrounded me
For tidings of the life to be,
Who long had prayed the silent Head
To haste its advent morn.

Their eyes were lit with artless trust,
Hope thrilled their every tone;
"A scene the loveliest, is it not?
A pure delight, a beauty-spot
Where all is gentle, true and just,
And darkness is unknown?"

My heart was anguished for their sake,
I could not frame a word;
And they descried my sunken face,
And seemed to read therein, and trace
The news that pity would not break,
Nor truth leave unaverred.

And as I silently retired
I turned and watched them still,
And they came helter-skelter out,
Driven forward like a rabble rout
Into the world they had so desired
By the all-immanent Will.

1905

THE MAN HE KILLED

"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because -
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although
"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like — just as I -
Was out of work — had sold his traps -
No other reason why.
"Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown."
1902

GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE (A MEMORY OF CHRISTIANA C-)

Where Blackmoor was, the road that led
To Bath, she could not show,
Nor point the sky that overspread
Towns ten miles off or so.
But that Calcutta stood this way,
Cape Horn there figured fell,
That here was Boston, here Bombay,
She could declare full well.
Less known to her the track athwart
Froom Mead or Yell'ham Wood
Than how to make some Austral port
In seas of surly mood.
She saw the glint of Guinea's shore
Behind the plum-tree nigh,
Heard old unruly Biscay's roar
In the weir's purl hard by . . .
"My son's a sailor, and he knows
All seas and many lands,
And when he's home he points and shows
Each country where it stands.

"He's now just there — by Gib's high rock -
And when he gets, you see,
To Portsmouth here, behind the clock,
Then he'll come back to me!"

ONE RALPH BLOSSOM SOLILOQUIZES

("It being deposed that vij women who were mayds before he knew them have been brought upon the towne [rates?] by the fornicacions of one Ralph Blossom, Mr Major inquired why he should not contribute xiv pence weekly toward their mayntenance. But it being shewn that the sayd R. B. was dying of a purple feaver, no order was made." — Budmouth Borough Minutes: 16 — .)

When I am in hell or some such place,
A-groaning over my sorry case,
What will those seven women say to me
Who, when I coaxed them, answered "Aye" to me?

"I did not understand your sign!"
Will be the words of Caroline;
While Jane will cry, "If I'd had proof of you,
I should have learnt to hold aloof of you!"

"I won't reproach: it was to be!"
Will dryly murmur Cicely;
And Rosa: "I feel no hostility,
For I must own I lent facility."

Lizzy says: "Sharp was my regret,
And sometimes it is now! But yet
I joy that, though it brought notoriousness,
I knew Love once and all its gloriousness!"

Says Patience: "Why are we apart?
Small harm did you, my poor Sweet Heart!
A manchild born, now tall and beautiful,
Was worth the ache of days undutiful."

And Anne cries: "O the time was fair,
So wherefore should you burn down there?
There is a deed under the sun, my Love,
And that was ours. What's done is done, my Love.
These trumpets here in Heaven are dumb to me
With you away. Dear, come, O come to me!"

THE NOBLE LADY'S TALE (circa 1790)

I

"We moved with pensive paces,
I and he,
And bent our faded faces
Wistfully,
For something troubled him, and troubled me.
"The lanthorn feebly lightened
Our grey hall,
Where ancient brands had brightened
Hearth and wall,
And shapes long vanished whither vanish all.
"'O why, Love, nightly, daily,'
I had said,
'Dost sigh, and smile so palely,
As if shed
Were all Life's blossoms, all its dear things dead?'
"'Since silence sets thee grieving,'
He replied,
'And I abhor deceiving
One so tried,
Why, Love, I'll speak, ere time us twain divide.'
"He held me, I remember,
Just as when
Our life was June — (September
It was then);
And we walked on, until he spoke again.
"'Susie, an Irish mummer,
Loud-acclaimed
Through the gay London summer,
Was I; named
A master in my art, who would be famed.
"'But lo, there beamed before me
Lady Su;
God's altar-vow she swore me
When none knew,
And for her sake I bade the sock adieu.

"'My Lord your father's pardon
Thus I won:
He let his heart unharden
Towards his son,
And honourably condoned what we had done;
"'But said — recall you, dearest? -
As for Su,
I'd see her — ay, though nearest
Me unto -
Sooner entombed than in a stage purlieu!
"'Just so. — And here he housed us,
In this nook,
Where Love like balm has drowsed us:
Robin, rook,
Our chief familiars, next to string and book.
"'Our days here, peace-enshrouded,
Followed strange
The old stage-joyance, crowded,
Rich in range;
But never did my soul desire a change,
"'Till now, when far uncertain
Lips of yore
Call, call me to the curtain,
There once more,
But ONCE, to tread the boards I trod before.
"'A night — the last and single
Ere I die -
To face the lights, to mingle
As did I
Once in the game, and rivet every eye!'
"'To something drear, distressing
As the knell
Of all hopes worth possessing!' . . .
— What befell
Seemed linked with me, but how I could not tell.
"Hours passed; till I implored him,
As he knew
How faith and frankness toward him
Ruled me through,
To say what ill I had done, and could undo.

"'FAITH — FRANKNESS. Ah! Heaven save such!'
Murmured he,
'They are wedded wealth! I gave such
Liberally,
But you, Dear, not. For you suspected me.'
"I was about beseeching
In hurt haste
More meaning, when he, reaching
To my waist,
Led me to pace the hall as once we paced.
"'I never meant to draw you
To own all,'
Declared he. 'But — I SAW you -
By the wall,
Half-hid. And that was why I failed withal!'
"'Where? when?' said I — 'Why, nigh me,
At the play
That night. That you should spy me,
Doubt my fay,
And follow, furtive, took my heart away!'
"That I had never been there,
But had gone
To my locked room — unseen there,
Curtains drawn,
Long days abiding — told I, wonder-wan.
"'Nay, 'twas your form and vesture,
Cloak and gown,
Your hooded features — gesture
Half in frown,
That faced me, pale,' he urged, 'that night in town.
"'And when, outside, I handed
To her chair
(As courtesy demanded
Of me there)
The leading lady, you peeped from the stair.
"Straight pleaded I: 'Forsooth, Love,
Had I gone,
I must have been in truth, Love,
Mad to don
Such well-known raiment.' But he still went on

”That he was not mistaken
Nor misled. -
I felt like one forsaken,
Wished me dead,
That he could think thus of the wife he had wed!
”His going seemed to waste him
Like a curse,
To wreck what once had graced him;
And, averse
To my approach, he mused, and moped, and worse.
”Till, what no words effected
Thought achieved:
IT WAS MY WRAITH — projected,
He conceived,
Thither, by my tense brain at home aggrieved.
”Thereon his credence centred
Till he died;
And, no more tempted, entered
Sanctified,
The little vault with room for one beside.”

III

Thus far the lady’s story. -
Now she, too,
Reclines within that hoary
Last dark mew
In Mellstock Quire with him she loved so true.
A yellowing marble, placed there
Tablet-wise,
And two joined hearts enchased there
Meet the eyes;
And reading their twin names we moralise:
Did she, we wonder, follow
Jealously?
And were those protests hollow? -
Or saw he
Some semblant dame? Or can wraiths really be?

Were it she went, her honour,
All may hold,
Pressed truth at last upon her
Till she told -
(Him only — others as these lines unfold.)
Riddle death-sealed for ever,
Let it rest! . . .
One's heart could blame her never
If one guessed
That go she did. She knew her actor best.

UNREALIZED

Down comes the winter rain -
Spoils my hat and bow -
Runs into the poll of me;
But mother won't know.
We've been out and caught a cold,
Knee-deep in snow;
Such a lucky thing it is
That mother won't know!
Rosy lost herself last night -
Couldn't tell where to go.
Yes — it rather frightened her,
But mother didn't know.
Somebody made Willy drunk
At the Christmas show:
O 'twas fun! It's well for him
That mother won't know!
Howsoever wild we are,
Late at school or slow,
Mother won't be cross with us,
Mother won't know.
How we cried the day she died!
Neighbours whispering low . . .
But we now do what we will -
Mother won't know.

WAGTAIL AND BABY

A baby watched a ford, whereto
A wagtail came for drinking;
A blaring bull went wading through,
The wagtail showed no shrinking.
A stallion splashed his way across,
The birdie nearly sinking;
He gave his plumes a twitch and toss,
And held his own unblinking.
Next saw the baby round the spot
A mongrel slowly slinking;
The wagtail gazed, but faltered not
In dip and sip and prinking.
A perfect gentleman then neared;
The wagtail, in a winking,
With terror rose and disappeared;
The baby fell a-thinking.

ABERDEEN

(April: 1905)

"And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times." — Isaiah xxxiii. 6.

I looked and thought, "All is too gray and cold
To wake my place-enthusiasms of old!"
Till a voice passed: "Behind that granite mien
Lurks the imposing beauty of a Queen."
I looked anew; and saw the radiant form
Of Her who soothes in stress, who steers in storm,
On the grave influence of whose eyes sublime
Men count for the stability of the time.

GEORGE MEREDITH 1828-1909

Forty years back, when much had place
That since has perished out of mind,
I heard that voice and saw that face.
He spoke as one afoot will wind
A morning horn ere men awake;
His note was trenchant, turning kind.

He was of those whose wit can shake
And riddle to the very core
The counterfeits that Time will break . . .
Of late, when we two met once more,
The luminous countenance and rare
Shone just as forty years before.
So that, when now all tongues declare
His shape unseen by his green hill,
I scarce believe he sits not there.
No matter. Further and further still
Through the world's vaporous vitiate air
His words wing on — as live words will.
May 1909.

YELL'HAM-WOOD'S STORY

Coomb-Firtrees say that Life is a moan,
And Clyffe-hill Clump says "Yea!"
But Yell'ham says a thing of its own:
It's not "Gray, gray
Is Life alway!"
That Yell'ham says,
Nor that Life is for ends unknown.
It says that Life would signify
A thwarted purposing:
That we come to live, and are called to die,
Yes, that's the thing
In fall, in spring,
That Yell'ham says:-
"Life offers — to deny!"
1902

A YOUNG MAN'S EPIGRAM ON EXISTENCE

A senseless school, where we must give
Our lives that we may learn to live!
A dolt is he who memorizes
Lessons that leave no time for prizes.
16 W. P. V., 1866.

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE

This collection of poems was published in 1914 and includes the 18 poem sequence 'Poems of 1912-13'. Satires and Circumstances is widely regarded to be the greatest achievement of Hardy's poetic career. With many poems being inspired by the tragic loss of his wife Emma, the collection includes some of the most powerful poems ever to portray the theme of bereavement.

The first edition

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- SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCES IN FIFTEEN GLIMPSES
- SELF-UNCONSCIOUS
- THE DISCOVERY
- TOLERANCE
- BEFORE AND AFTER SUMMER
- AT DAY-CLOSE IN NOVEMBER
- THE YEAR'S AWAKENING
- UNDER THE WATERFALL
- THE SPELL OF THE ROSE
- ST. LAUNCE'S REVISITED
- THE GOING
- YOUR LAST DRIVE
- THE WALK
- RAIN ON A GRAVE
- I FOUND HER OUT THERE
- WITHOUT CEREMONY

- LAMENT
- THE HAUNTER
- THE VOICE
- HIS VISITOR
- A CIRCULAR
- A DREAM OR NO
- AFTER A JOURNEY
- A DEATH-DAY RECALLED
- BEENY CLIFF
- AT CASTLE BOTEREL
- PLACES
- THE PHANTOM HORSEWOMAN
- MISCELLANEOUS PIECES
- THE WISTFUL LADY
- THE WOMAN IN THE RYE
- THE CHEVAL-GLASS
- THE RE-ENACTMENT
- HER SECRET
- SHE CHARGED ME
- THE NEWCOMER'S WIFE
- A CONVERSATION AT DAWN
- A KING'S SOLILOQUY ON THE NIGHT OF HIS FUNERAL
- THE CORONATION
- AQUAE SULIS
- SEVENTY-FOUR AND TWENTY

- THE ELOPEMENT
- I ROSE UP AS MY CUSTOM IS
- A WEEK
- HAD YOU WEPT
- BEREFT, SHE THINKS SHE DREAMS
- IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM
- IN THE SERVANTS' QUARTERS
- THE OBLITERATE TOMB
- REGRET NOT ME
- THE RECALCITRANTS
- STARLINGS ON THE ROOF
- THE MOON LOOKS IN
- THE SWEET HUSSY
- THE TELEGRAM
- THE MOTH-SIGNAL
- SEEN BY THE WAITS
- THE TWO SOLDIERS
- THE DEATH OF REGRET
- IN THE DAYS OF CRINOLINE
- THE ROMAN GRAVEMOUNDS
- THE WORKBOX
- THE SACRILEGE
- THE ABBEY MASON
- THE JUBILEE OF A MAGAZINE
- THE SATIN SHOES

- EXEUNT OMNES
- A POET
- POSTSCRIPT “MEN WHO MARCH AWAY” (SONG OF THE SOLDIERS)

IN FRONT OF THE LANDSCAPE

Plunging and labouring on in a tide of visions,
Dolorous and dear,
Forward I pushed my way as amid waste waters
Stretching around,
Through whose eddies there glimmered the customed landscape
Yonder and near,
Blotted to feeble mist. And the coomb and the upland
Foliage-crowned,
Ancient chalk-pit, milestone, rills in the grass-flat
Stroked by the light,
Seemed but a ghost-like gauze, and no substantial
Meadow or mound.
What were the infinite spectacles bulking foremost
Under my sight,
Hindering me to discern my paced advancement
Lengthening to miles;
What were the re-creations killing the daytime
As by the night?
O they were speechful faces, gazing insistent,
Some as with smiles,
Some as with slow-born tears that brinily trundled
Over the wrecked
Cheeks that were fair in their flush-time, ash now with anguish,
Harrowed by wiles.
Yes, I could see them, feel them, hear them, address them -
Halo-bedecked -
And, alas, onwards, shaken by fierce unreason,
Rigid in hate,
Smitten by years-long wryness born of misprision,
Dreaded, suspect.

Then there would breast me shining sights, sweet seasons
Further in date;
Instruments of strings with the tenderest passion
Vibrant, beside
Lamps long extinguished, robes, cheeks, eyes with the earth's crust
Now corporate.
Also there rose a headland of hoary aspect
Gnawed by the tide,
Frilled by the nimb of the morning as two friends stood there
Guilelessly glad -
Wherefore they knew not — touched by the fringe of an ecstasy
Scantly descried.
Later images too did the day unfurl me,
Shadowed and sad,
Clay cadavers of those who had shared in the dramas,
Laid now at ease,
Passions all spent, chiefest the one of the broad brow
Sepulture-clad.
So did beset me scenes miscalled of the bygone,
Over the leaze,
Past the clump, and down to where lay the beheld ones;
— Yea, as the rhyme
Sung by the sea-swell, so in their pleading dumbness
Captured me these.
For, their lost revisiting manifestations
In their own time
Much had I slighted, caring not for their purport,
Seeing behind
Things more coveted, reckoned the better worth calling
Sweet, sad, sublime.
Thus do they now show hourly before the intenser
Stare of the mind
As they were ghosts avenging their slights by my bypast
Body-borne eyes,
Show, too, with fuller translation than rested upon them
As living kind.
Hence wag the tongues of the passing people, saying
In their surmise,
"Ah — whose is this dull form that perambulates, seeing nought
Round him that looms
Whithersoever his footsteps turn in his farings,
Save a few tombs?"

CHANNEL FIRING

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgment-day
And sat upright. While drearisome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar-crumb,
The worms drew back into the mounds,
The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, "No;
It's gunnery practice out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be:
"All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
They do no more for Christes sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.
"That this is not the judgment-hour
For some of them's a blessed thing,
For if it were they'd have to scour
Hell's floor for so much threatening . . .
"Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need)."
So down we lay again. "I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be,"
Said one, "than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!"
And many a skeleton shook his head.
"Instead of preaching forty year,"
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,
"I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer."
Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.
April 1914.

THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN

(Lines on the loss of the "Titanic")

I

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls — grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" . . .
VI
Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything
VII
Prepared a sinister mate
For her — so gaily great -
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.
VIII

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

X

Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

THE GHOST OF THE PAST

We two kept house, the Past and I,
The Past and I;
I tended while it hovered nigh,
Leaving me never alone.
It was a spectral housekeeping
Where fell no jarring tone,
As strange, as still a housekeeping
As ever has been known.
As daily I went up the stair
And down the stair,
I did not mind the Bygone there -
The Present once to me;
Its moving meek companionship
I wished might ever be,
There was in that companionship
Something of ecstasy.

It dwelt with me just as it was,
Just as it was
When first its prospects gave me pause
In wayward wanderings,
Before the years had torn old troths
As they tear all sweet things,
Before gaunt griefs had torn old troths
And dulled old rapturings.
And then its form began to fade,
Began to fade,
Its gentle echoes faintlier played
At eves upon my ear
Than when the autumn's look embrowned
The lonely chambers here,
The autumn's settling shades embrowned
Nooks that it haunted near.
And so with time my vision less,
Yea, less and less
Makes of that Past my housemistress,
It dwindles in my eye;
It looms a far-off skeleton
And not a comrade nigh,
A fitful far-off skeleton
Dimming as days draw by.

AFTER THE VISIT

(To F. E. D.)
Come again to the place
Where your presence was as a leaf that skims
Down a drouthy way whose ascent bedims
The bloom on the farer's face.
Come again, with the feet
That were light on the green as a thistledown ball,
And those mute ministrations to one and to all
Beyond a man's saying sweet.
Until then the faint scent
Of the bordering flowers swam unheeded away,
And I marked not the charm in the changes of day
As the cloud-colours came and went.

Through the dark corridors
Your walk was so soundless I did not know
Your form from a phantom's of long ago
Said to pass on the ancient floors,
Till you drew from the shade,
And I saw the large luminous living eyes
Regard me in fixed inquiring-wise
As those of a soul that weighed,
Scarce consciously,
The eternal question of what Life was,
And why we were there, and by whose strange laws
That which mattered most could not be.

TO MEET, OR OTHERWISE

Whether to sally and see thee, girl of my dreams,
Or whether to stay
And see thee not! How vast the difference seems
Of Yea from Nay
Just now. Yet this same sun will slant its beams
At no far day
On our two mounds, and then what will the difference weigh!
Yet I will see thee, maiden dear, and make
The most I can
Of what remains to us amid this brake Cimmerian
Through which we grope, and from whose thorns we ache,
While still we scan
Round our frail faltering progress for some path or plan.
By briefest meeting something sure is won;
It will have been:
Nor God nor Daemon can undo the done,
Unsight the seen,
Make muted music be as unbegun,
Though things terrene
Groan in their bondage till oblivion supervene.

So, to the one long-sweeping symphony
From times remote
Till now, of human tenderness, shall we
Supply one note,
Small and untraced, yet that will ever be
Somewhere afloat
Amid the spheres, as part of sick Life's antidote.

THE DIFFERENCE

I

Sinking down by the gate I discern the thin moon,
And a blackbird tries over old airs in the pine,
But the moon is a sorry one, sad the bird's tune,
For this spot is unknown to that Heartmate of mine.

II

Did my Heartmate but haunt here at times such as now,
The song would be joyous and cheerful the moon;
But she will see never this gate, path, or bough,
Nor I find a joy in the scene or the tune.

THE SUN ON THE BOOKCASE

(Student's Love-song)
Once more the cauldron of the sun
Smears the bookcase with winy red,
And here my page is, and there my bed,
And the apple-tree shadows travel along.
Soon their intangible track will be run,
And dusk grow strong
And they be fled.
Yes: now the boiling ball is gone,
And I have wasted another day . . .
But wasted — WASTED, do I say?
Is it a waste to have imaged one
Beyond the hills there, who, anon,
My great deeds done
Will be mine alway?

WHEN I SET OUT FOR LYONNESSE

When I set out for Lyonnesse,
A hundred miles away,
The rime was on the spray,
And starlight lit my lonesomeness
When I set out for Lyonnesse
A hundred miles away.

What would bechance at Lyonnesse
While I should sojourn there
No prophet durst declare,
Nor did the wisest wizard guess
What would bechance at Lyonnesse
While I should sojourn there.

When I came back from Lyonnesse
With magic in my eyes,
None managed to surmise
What meant my godlike gloriousness,
When I came back from Lyonnesse
With magic in my eyes.

A THUNDERSTORM IN TOWN

(A Reminiscence)

She wore a new "terra-cotta" dress,
And we stayed, because of the pelting storm,
Within the hansom's dry recess,
Though the horse had stopped; yea, motionless
We sat on, snug and warm.

Then the downpour ceased, to my sharp sad pain,
And the glass that had screened our forms before
Flew up, and out she sprang to her door:
I should have kissed her if the rain
Had lasted a minute more.

THE TORN LETTER

I

I tore your letter into strips
No bigger than the airy feathers
That ducks preen out in changing weathers
Upon the shifting ripple-tips.

II

In darkness on my bed alone
I seemed to see you in a vision,
And hear you say: "Why this derision
Of one drawn to you, though unknown?"

III

Yes, eve's quick mood had run its course,
The night had cooled my hasty madness;
I suffered a regretful sadness
Which deepened into real remorse.

IV

I thought what pensive patient days
A soul must know of grain so tender,
How much of good must grace the sender
Of such sweet words in such bright phrase.

V

Uprising then, as things unpriced
I sought each fragment, patched and mended;
The midnight whitened ere I had ended
And gathered words I had sacrificed.

VI

But some, alas, of those I threw
Were past my search, destroyed for ever:
They were your name and place; and never
Did I regain those clues to you.

VII

I learnt I had missed, by rash unheed,
My track; that, so the Will decided,
In life, death, we should be divided,
And at the sense I ached indeed.

VIII

That ache for you, born long ago,
Throbs on; I never could outgrow it.
What a revenge, did you but know it!
But that, thank God, you do not know.

BEYOND THE LAST LAMP

(Near Tooting Common)

I

While rain, with eve in partnership,
Descended darkly, drip, drip, drip,
Beyond the last lone lamp I passed
Walking slowly, whispering sadly,
Two linked loiterers, wan, downcast:
Some heavy thought constrained each face,
And blinded them to time and place.

II

The pair seemed lovers, yet absorbed
In mental scenes no longer orbed
By love's young rays. Each countenance
As it slowly, as it sadly
Caught the lamplight's yellow glance
Held in suspense a misery
At things which had been or might be.

III

When I retrod that watery way
Some hours beyond the droop of day,
Still I found pacing there the twain
Just as slowly, just as sadly,
Heedless of the night and rain.
One could but wonder who they were
And what wild woe detained them there.

IV

Though thirty years of blur and blot
Have slid since I beheld that spot,
And saw in curious converse there
Moving slowly, moving sadly
That mysterious tragic pair,
Its olden look may linger on -
All but the couple; they have gone.

V

Whither? Who knows, indeed . . . And yet
To me, when nights are weird and wet,
Without those comrades there at tryst
Creeping slowly, creeping sadly,
That lone lane does not exist.
There they seem brooding on their pain,
And will, while such a lane remain.

THE FACE AT THE CASEMENT

If ever joy leave
An abiding sting of sorrow,
So befell it on the morrow
Of that May eve . . .
The travelled sun dropped
To the north-west, low and lower,
The pony's trot grew slower,
And then we stopped.

"This cosy house just by
I must call at for a minute,
A sick man lies within it
Who soon will die.
"He wished to marry me,
So I am bound, when I drive near him,
To inquire, if but to cheer him,
How he may be."
A message was sent in,
And wordlessly we waited,
Till some one came and stated
The bulletin.
And that the sufferer said,
For her call no words could thank her;
As his angel he must rank her
Till life's spark fled.
Slowly we drove away,
When I turned my head, although not
Called; why so I turned I know not
Even to this day.
And lo, there in my view
Pressed against an upper lattice
Was a white face, gazing at us
As we withdrew.
And well did I divine
It to be the man's there dying,
Who but lately had been sighing
For her pledged mine.
Then I deigned a deed of hell;
It was done before I knew it;
What devil made me do it
I cannot tell!
Yes, while he gazed above,
I put my arm about her
That he might see, nor doubt her
My plighted Love.
The pale face vanished quick,
As if blasted, from the casement,
And my shame and self-abasement
Began their prick.

And they prick on, ceaselessly,
For that stab in Love's fierce fashion
Which, unfired by lover's passion,
Was foreign to me.
She smiled at my caress,
But why came the soft embowment
Of her shoulder at that moment
She did not guess.
Long long years has he lain
In thy garth, O sad Saint Cleather:
What tears there, bared to weather,
Will cleanse that stain!
Love is long-suffering, brave,
Sweet, prompt, precious as a jewel;
But O, too, Love is cruel,
Cruel as the grave.

LOST LOVE

I play my sweet old airs -
The airs he knew
When our love was true -
But he does not balk
His determined walk,
And passes up the stairs.
I sing my songs once more,
And presently hear
His footstep near
As if it would stay;
But he goes his way,
And shuts a distant door.
So I wait for another morn
And another night
In this soul-sick blight;
And I wonder much
As I sit, why such
A woman as I was born!

MY SPIRIT WILL NOT HAUNT THE MOUND

My spirit will not haunt the mound
Above my breast,
But travel, memory-possessed,
To where my tremulous being found
Life largest, best.

My phantom-footed shape will go
When nightfall grays
Hither and thither along the ways
I and another used to know
In backward days.

And there you'll find me, if a jot
You still should care
For me, and for my curious air;
If otherwise, then I shall not,
For you, be there.

WESSEX HEIGHTS (1896)

There are some heights in Wessex, shaped as if by a kindly hand
For thinking, dreaming, dying on, and at crises when I stand,
Say, on Ingpen Beacon eastward, or on Wylls-Neck westwardly,
I seem where I was before my birth, and after death may be.

In the lowlands I have no comrade, not even the lone man's friend -
Her who suffereth long and is kind; accepts what he is too weak to mend:
Down there they are dubious and askance; there nobody thinks as I,
But mind-chains do not clank where one's next neighbour is the sky.

In the towns I am tracked by phantoms having weird detective ways -
Shadows of beings who fellowed with myself of earlier days:
They hang about at places, and they say harsh heavy things -
Men with a frigid sneer, and women with tart disparagings.

Down there I seem to be false to myself, my simple self that was,
And is not now, and I see him watching, wondering what crass cause
Can have merged him into such a strange continuator as this,
Who yet has something in common with himself, my chrysalis.

I cannot go to the great grey Plain; there's a figure against the moon,
Nobody sees it but I, and it makes my breast beat out of tune;
I cannot go to the tall-spired town, being barred by the forms now passed
For everybody but me, in whose long vision they stand there fast.

There's a ghost at Yell'ham Bottom chiding loud at the fall of the night,
There's a ghost in Froom-side Vale, thin lipped and vague, in a shroud of white,
There is one in the railway-train whenever I do not want it near,
I see its profile against the pane, saying what I would not hear.

As for one rare fair woman, I am now but a thought of hers,
I enter her mind and another thought succeeds me that she prefers;
Yet my love for her in its fulness she herself even did not know;
Well, time cures hearts of tenderness, and now I can let her go.

So I am found on Ingpen Beacon, or on Wylls-Neck to the west,
Or else on homely Bulbarrow, or little Pilsdon Crest,
Where men have never cared to haunt, nor women have walked with me,
And ghosts then keep their distance; and I know some liberty.

IN DEATH DIVIDED

I

I shall rot here, with those whom in their day
You never knew,
And alien ones who, ere they chilled to clay,
Met not my view,
Will in your distant grave-place ever neighbour you.

II

No shade of pinnacle or tree or tower,
While earth endures,
Will fall on my mound and within the hour
Steal on to yours;
One robin never haunt our two green covertures.

III

Some organ may resound on Sunday noons
By where you lie,
Some other thrill the panes with other tunes
Where moulder I;
No selfsame chords compose our common lullaby.

IV

The simply-cut memorial at my head
Perhaps may take
A Gothic form, and that above your bed
Be Greek in make;
No linking symbol show thereon for our tale's sake.

V

And in the monotonous moils of strained, hard-run
Humanity,
The eternal tie which binds us twain in one
No eye will see
Stretching across the miles that sever you from me.

THE PLACE ON THE MAP

I

I look upon the map that hangs by me -
Its shires and towns and rivers lined in varnished artistry -
And I mark a jutting height
Coloured purple, with a margin of blue sea.

II

— 'Twas a day of latter summer, hot and dry;
Ay, even the waves seemed drying as we walked on, she and I,
By this spot where, calmly quite,
She informed me what would happen by and by.

III

This hanging map depicts the coast and place,
And resuscitates therewith our unexpected troublous case
All distinctly to my sight,
And her tension, and the aspect of her face.

IV

Weeks and weeks we had loved beneath that blazing blue,
Which had lost the art of raining, as her eyes to-day had too,
While she told what, as by sleight,
Shot our firmament with rays of ruddy hue.

V

For the wonder and the wormwood of the whole
Was that what in realms of reason would have joyed our double soul
Wore a torrid tragic light
Under order-keeping's rigorous control.

VI

So, the map revives her words, the spot, the time,
And the thing we found we had to face before the next year's prime;
The charted coast stares bright,
And its episode comes back in pantomime.

WHERE THE PICNIC WAS

Where we made the fire,
In the summer time,
Of branch and briar
On the hill to the sea
I slowly climb
Through winter mire,
And scan and trace
The forsaken place
Quite readily.

Now a cold wind blows,
And the grass is gray,
But the spot still shows
As a burnt circle — aye,
And stick-ends, charred,
Still strew the sward
Whereon I stand,
Last relic of the band
Who came that day!
Yes, I am here
Just as last year,
And the sea breathes brine
From its strange straight line
Up hither, the same
As when we four came.
- But two have wandered far
From this grassy rise
Into urban roar
Where no picnics are,
And one — has shut her eyes
For evermore.

THE SCHRECKHORN

(With thoughts of Leslie Stephen)
(June 1897)

Aloof, as if a thing of mood and whim;
Now that its spare and desolate figure gleams
Upon my nearing vision, less it seems
A looming Alp-height than a guise of him
Who scaled its horn with ventured life and limb,
Drawn on by vague imaginings, maybe,
Of semblance to his personality
In its quaint glooms, keen lights, and rugged trim.
At his last change, when Life's dull coils unwind,
Will he, in old love, hitherward escape,
And the eternal essence of his mind
Enter this silent adamantine shape,
And his low voicing haunt its slipping snows
When dawn that calls the climber dyes them rose?

A SINGER ASLEEP

(Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1837-1909)

I

In this fair niche above the unslumbering sea,
That sentrys up and down all night, all day,
From cove to promontory, from ness to bay,
The Fates have fitly bidden that he should be Pillowed eternally.

II

- It was as though a garland of red roses
  Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
  When irresponsibly dropped as from the sun,
  In fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes,
  Upon Victoria's formal middle time
  His leaves of rhythm and rhyme.

III

O that far morning of a summer day
When, down a terraced street whose pavements lay
Glassing the sunshine into my bent eyes,
I walked and read with a quick glad surprise
New words, in classic guise, -

IV

The passionate pages of his earlier years,
Fraught with hot sighs, sad laughters, kisses, tears;
Fresh-fluted notes, yet from a minstrel who
Blew them not naively, but as one who knew
Full well why thus he blew.

V

I still can hear the brabble and the roar
At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!
Their power is spent like spindrift on this shore;
Thine swells yet more and more.

VI

- His singing-mistress verily was no other
  Than she the Lesbian, she the music-mother
  Of all the tribe that feel in melodies;
  Who leapt, love-anguished, from the Leucadian steep
  Into the rambling world-encircling deep
  Which hides her where none sees.

VII

And one can hold in thought that nightly here
His phantom may draw down to the water's brim,
And hers come up to meet it, as a dim
Lone shine upon the heaving hydrosphere,
And mariners wonder as they traverse near,
Unknowing of her and him.

VIII

One dreams him sighing to her spectral form:
"O teacher, where lies hid thy burning line;
Where are those songs, O poetess divine
Whose very arts are love incarnadine?"
And her smile back: "Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine." . . .

IX

So here, beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations
Shake him when storms make mountains of their plains -
Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes -
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines.

BONCHURCH, 1910.

A PLAINT TO MAN

When you slowly emerged from the den of Time,
And gained percipience as you grew,
And fleshed you fair out of shapeless slime,
Wherefore, O Man, did there come to you
The unhappy need of creating me -
A form like your own — for praying to?
My virtue, power, utility,
Within my maker must all abide,
Since none in myself can ever be,
One thin as a shape on a lantern-slide
Shown forth in the dark upon some dim sheet,
And by none but its showman vivified.
"Such a forced device," you may say, "is meet
For easing a loaded heart at whiles:
Man needs to conceive of a mercy-seat
Somewhere above the gloomy aisles
Of this wailful world, or he could not bear
The irk no local hope beguiles."

- But since I was framed in your first despair
  The doing without me has had no play
  In the minds of men when shadows scare;

And now that I dwindle day by day
Beneath the deicide eyes of seers
In a light that will not let me stay,
And to-morrow the whole of me disappears,
The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
That had best been faced in earlier years:
The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced
With loving-kindness fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown.
1909-10.

GOD'S FUNERAL

I

I saw a slowly-stepping train -
Lined on the brows, scoop-eyed and bent and hoar -
Following in files across a twilit plain
A strange and mystic form the foremost bore.

II

And by contagious throbs of thought
Or latent knowledge that within me lay
And had already stirred me, I was wrought
To consciousness of sorrow even as they.

III

The fore-borne shape, to my blurred eyes,
At first seemed man-like, and anon to change
To an amorphous cloud of marvellous size,
At times endowed with wings of glorious range.

IV

And this phantasmal variousness
Ever possessed it as they drew along:
Yet throughout all it symboled none the less
Potency vast and loving-kindness strong.

V

Almost before I knew I bent
Towards the moving columns without a word;
They, growing in bulk and numbers as they went,
Struck out sick thoughts that could be overheard:-

VI

"O man-projected Figure, of late
Imaged as we, thy knell who shall survive?
Whence came it we were tempted to create
One whom we can no longer keep alive?

VII

"Framing him jealous, fierce, at first,
We gave him justice as the ages rolled,
Will to bless those by circumstance accurst,
And longsuffering, and mercies manifold.
VIII
"And, tricked by our own early dream
And need of solace, we grew self-deceived,
Our making soon our maker did we deem,
And what we had imagined we believed.

IX

"Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,
Uncompromising rude reality
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be.

X

"So, toward our myth's oblivion,
Darkling, and languid-lipped, we creep and grope
Sadlier than those who wept in Babylon,
Whose Zion was a still abiding hope.

XI

"How sweet it was in years far hied
To start the wheels of day with trustful prayer,
To lie down liegely at the eventide
And feel a blest assurance he was there!

XII

"And who or what shall fill his place?
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
Towards the goal of their enterprise?" . . .

XIII

Some in the background then I saw,
Sweet women, youths, men, all incredulous,
Who chimed as one: "This figure is of straw,
This requiem mockery! Still he lives to us!"

XIV

I could not prop their faith: and yet
Many I had known: with all I sympathized;
And though struck speechless, I did not forget
That what was mourned for, I, too, once had prized.

XV

Still, how to bear such loss I deemed
The insistent question for each animate mind,
And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,

XVI

Whereof to lift the general night,
A certain few who stood aloof had said,
"See you upon the horizon that small light -
Swelling somewhat?" Each mourner shook his head.

XVII

And they composed a crowd of whom
Some were right good, and many nigh the best . . .
Thus dazed and puzzled 'twixt the gleam and gloom
Mechanically I followed with the rest.

1908-10.

SPECTRES THAT GRIEVE

"It is not death that harrows us," they lipped,
"The soundless cell is in itself relief,
For life is an unfenced flower, benumbed and nipped
At unawares, and at its best but brief."

The speakers, sundry phantoms of the gone,
Had risen like filmy flames of phosphor dye,
As if the palest of sheet lightnings shone
From the sward near me, as from a nether sky.
And much surprised was I that, spent and dead,
They should not, like the many, be at rest,
But stray as apparitions; hence I said,
"Why, having slipped life, hark you back distressed?
"We are among the few death sets not free,
The hurt, misrepresented names, who come
At each year's brink, and cry to History
To do them justice, or go past them dumb.
"We are stript of rights; our shames lie unredressed,
Our deeds in full anatomy are not shown,
Our words in morsels merely are expressed
On the scriptured page, our motives blurred, unknown."
Then all these shaken slighted visitants sped
Into the vague, and left me musing there
On fames that well might instance what they had said,
Until the New-Year's dawn strode up the air.

AH, ARE YOU DIGGING ON MY GRAVE?

"Ah, are you digging on my grave
My loved one? — planting rue?"
- "No: yesterday he went to wed
One of the brightest wealth has bred.
'It cannot hurt her now,' he said,
'That I should not be true.'"
"Then who is digging on my grave?
My nearest dearest kin?"
- "Ah, no; they sit and think, 'What use!
What good will planting flowers produce?
No tendance of her mound can loose
Her spirit from Death's gin.'"
"But some one digs upon my grave?
My enemy? — prodding sly?"
- "Nay: when she heard you had passed the Gate
That shuts on all flesh soon or late,
She thought you no more worth her hate,
And cares not where you lie."

"Then, who is digging on my grave?
Say — since I have not guessed!"
- "O it is I, my mistress dear,
Your little dog, who still lives near,
And much I hope my movements here
Have not disturbed your rest?"
"Ah, yes! YOU dig upon my grave . . .
Why flashed it not on me
That one true heart was left behind!
What feeling do we ever find
To equal among human kind
A dog's fidelity!"
"Mistress, I dug upon your grave
To bury a bone, in case
I should be hungry near this spot
When passing on my daily trot.
I am sorry, but I quite forgot
It was your resting-place."

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCES IN FIFTEEN GLIMPSES

I — AT TEA

The kettle descants in a cozy drone,
And the young wife looks in her husband's face,
And then at her guest's, and shows in her own
Her sense that she fills an envied place;
And the visiting lady is all abloom,
And says there was never so sweet a room.
And the happy young housewife does not know
That the woman beside her was first his choice,
Till the fates ordained it could not be so . . .
Betraying nothing in look or voice
The guest sits smiling and sips her tea,
And he throws her a stray glance yearningly.

II — IN CHURCH

"And now to God the Father," he ends,
And his voice thrills up to the topmost tiles:
Each listener chokes as he bows and bends,
And emotion pervades the crowded aisles.
Then the preacher glides to the vestry-door,
And shuts it, and thinks he is seen no more.
The door swings softly ajar meanwhile,
And a pupil of his in the Bible class,
Who adores him as one without gloss or guile,
Sees her idol stand with a satisfied smile
And re-enact at the vestry-glass
Each pulpit gesture in deft dumb-show
That had moved the congregation so.

III — BY HER AUNT'S GRAVE

"Sixpence a week," says the girl to her lover,
"Aunt used to bring me, for she could confide
In me alone, she vowed. 'Twas to cover
The cost of her headstone when she died.
And that was a year ago last June;
I've not yet fixed it. But I must soon."
"And where is the money now, my dear?"
"O, snug in my purse . . . Aunt was SO slow
In saving it — eighty weeks, or near." . . .
"Let's spend it," he hints. "For she won't know.
There's a dance to-night at the Load of Hay."
She passively nods. And they go that way.

IV — IN THE ROOM OF THE BRIDE-ELECT

"Would it had been the man of our wish!"
Sighs her mother. To whom with vehemence she
In the wedding-dress — the wife to be -
"Then why were you so mollyish
As not to insist on him for me!"
The mother, amazed: "Why, dearest one,
Because you pleaded for this or none!"

"But Father and you should have stood out strong!
Since then, to my cost, I have lived to find
That you were right and that I was wrong;
This man is a dolt to the one declined . . .
Ah! — here he comes with his button-hole rose.
Good God — I must marry him I suppose!"

V — AT A WATERING-PLACE

They sit and smoke on the esplanade,
The man and his friend, and regard the bay
Where the far chalk cliffs, to the left displayed,
Smile sallowly in the decline of day.
And saunterers pass with laugh and jest -
A handsome couple among the rest.

"That smart proud pair," says the man to his friend,
"Are to marry next week . . . How little he thinks
That dozens of days and nights on end
I have stroked her neck, unhooked the links
Of her sleeve to get at her upper arm . . .
Well, bliss is in ignorance: what's the harm!"

VI — IN THE CEMETERY

"You see those mothers squabbling there?"
Remarks the man of the cemetery.
One says in tears, ''Tis mine lies here!'
Another, 'Nay, mine, you Pharisee!'
Another, 'How dare you move my flowers
And put your own on this grave of ours!'
But all their children were laid therein
At different times, like sprats in a tin.

"And then the main drain had to cross,
And we moved the lot some nights ago,
And packed them away in the general foss
With hundreds more. But their folks don't know,
And as well cry over a new-laid drain
As anything else, to ease your pain!"

VII — OUTSIDE THE WINDOW

"My stick!" he says, and turns in the lane
To the house just left, whence a vixen voice
Comes out with the firelight through the pane,
And he sees within that the girl of his choice
Stands rating her mother with eyes aglare
For something said while he was there.
"At last I behold her soul undraped!"
Thinks the man who had loved her more than himself;
"My God — 'tis but narrowly I have escaped. -
My precious porcelain proves it delf."
His face has reddened like one ashamed,
And he steals off, leaving his stick unclaimed.

VIII — IN THE STUDY

He enters, and mute on the edge of a chair
Sits a thin-faced lady, a stranger there,
A type of decayed gentility;
And by some small signs he well can guess
That she comes to him almost breakfastless.
"I have called — I hope I do not err -
I am looking for a purchaser
Of some score volumes of the works
Of eminent divines I own, -
Left by my father — though it irks
My patience to offer them." And she smiles
As if necessity were unknown;
"But the truth of it is that oftenwhiles
I have wished, as I am fond of art,
To make my rooms a little smart."
And lightly still she laughs to him,
As if to sell were a mere gay whim,
And that, to be frank, Life were indeed
To her not vinegar and gall,
But fresh and honey-like; and Need
No household skeleton at all.

IX — AT THE ALTAR-RAIL

"My bride is not coming, alas!" says the groom,
And the telegram shakes in his hand. "I own
It was hurried! We met at a dancing-room
When I went to the Cattle-Show alone,
And then, next night, where the Fountain leaps,
And the Street of the Quarter-Circle sweeps.

"Ay, she won me to ask her to be my wife -
'Twas foolish perhaps! — to forsake the ways
Of the flaring town for a farmer's life.
She agreed. And we fixed it. Now she says:
'It's sweet of you, dear, to prepare me a nest,
But a swift, short, gay life suits me best.
What I really am you have never gleaned;
I had eaten the apple ere you were weaned.'"

X — IN THE NUPTIAL CHAMBER

"O that mastering tune?" And up in the bed
Like a lace-robed phantom springs the bride;
"And why?" asks the man she had that day wed,
With a start, as the band plays on outside.
"It's the townsfolks' cheery compliment
Because of our marriage, my Innocent."

"O but you don't know! 'Tis the passionate air
To which my old Love waltzed with me,
And I swore as we spun that none should share
My home, my kisses, till death, save he!
And he dominates me and thrills me through,
And it's he I embrace while embracing you!"

XI — IN THE RESTAURANT

"But hear. If you stay, and the child be born,
It will pass as your husband's with the rest,
While, if we fly, the teeth of scorn
Will be gleaming at us from east to west;
And the child will come as a life despised;
I feel an elopement is ill-advised!"

"O you realise not what it is, my dear,
To a woman! Daily and hourly alarms
Lest the truth should out. How can I stay here,
And nightly take him into my arms!
Come to the child no name or fame,
Let us go, and face it, and bear the shame."

XII — AT THE DRAPER'S

"I stood at the back of the shop, my dear,
But you did not perceive me.
Well, when they deliver what you were shown
I shall know nothing of it, believe me!"
And he coughed and coughed as she paled and said,
"O, I didn't see you come in there -
Why couldn't you speak?" — "Well, I didn't. I left
That you should not notice I'd been there.
"You were viewing some lovely things. 'Soon required
For a widow, of latest fashion';
And I knew 'twould upset you to meet the man
Who had to be cold and ashen
"And screwed in a box before they could dress you
'In the last new note in mourning,'
As they defined it. So, not to distress you,
I left you to your adorning."

XIII — ON THE DEATH-BED

"I'll tell — being past all praying for -
Then promptly die . . . He was out at the war,
And got some scent of the intimacy
That was under way between her and me;
And he stole back home, and appeared like a ghost
One night, at the very time almost
That I reached her house. Well, I shot him dead,
And secretly buried him. Nothing was said.
"The news of the battle came next day;
He was scheduled missing. I hurried away,
Got out there, visited the field,
And sent home word that a search revealed
He was one of the slain; though, lying alone
And stript, his body had not been known.

"But she suspected. I lost her love,
Yea, my hope of earth, and of Heaven above;
And my time's now come, and I'll pay the score,
Though it be burning for evermore."

XIV — OVER THE COFFIN

They stand confronting, the coffin between,
His wife of old, and his wife of late,
And the dead man whose they both had been
Seems listening aloof, as to things past date.
— "I have called," says the first. "Do you marvel or not?"
"In truth," says the second, "I do — somewhat."
"Well, there was a word to be said by me! . . .
I divorced that man because of you -
It seemed I must do it, boundenly;
But now I am older, and tell you true,
For life is little, and dead lies he;
I would I had let alone you two!
And both of us, scorning parochial ways,
Had lived like the wives in the patriarchs' days."

XV — IN THE MOONLIGHT

"O lonely workman, standing there
In a dream, why do you stare and stare
At her grave, as no other grave there were?
"If your great gaunt eyes so importune
Her soul by the shine of this corpse-cold moon,
Maybe you'll raise her phantom soon!"
"Why, fool, it is what I would rather see
Than all the living folk there be;
But alas, there is no such joy for me!"
"Ah — she was one you loved, no doubt,
Through good and evil, through rain and drought,
And when she passed, all your sun went out?"
"Nay: she was the woman I did not love,
Whom all the others were ranked above,
Whom during her life I thought nothing of."

SELF-UNCONSCIOUS

Along the way
He walked that day,
Watching shapes that reveries limn,
And seldom he
Had eyes to see
The moment that encompassed him.
Bright yellowhammers
Made mirthful clamours,
And billed long straws with a bustling air,
And bearing their load
Flew up the road
That he followed, alone, without interest there.
From bank to ground
And over and round
They sidled along the adjoining hedge;
Sometimes to the gutter
Their yellow flutter
Would dip from the nearest slatestone ledge.
The smooth sea-line
With a metal shine,
And flashes of white, and a sail thereon,
He would also descry
With a half-wrapt eye
Between the projects he mused upon.
Yes, round him were these
Earth's artistries,
But specious plans that came to his call
Did most engage
His pilgrimage,
While himself he did not see at all.
Dead now as sherds
Are the yellow birds,
And all that mattered has passed away;
Yet God, the Elf,
Now shows him that self
As he was, and should have been shown, that day.

O it would have been good
Could he then have stood
At a focussed distance, and conned the whole,
But now such vision
Is mere derision,
Nor soothes his body nor saves his soul.
Not much, some may
Incline to say,
To see therein, had it all been seen.
Nay! he is aware
A thing was there
That loomed with an immortal mien.

THE DISCOVERY

I wandered to a crude coast
Like a ghost;
Upon the hills I saw fires -
Funeral pyres
Seemingly — and heard breaking
Waves like distant cannonades that set the land shaking.
And so I never once guessed
A Love-nest,
Bowered and candle-lit, lay
In my way,
Till I found a hid hollow,
Where I burst on her my heart could not but follow.

TOLERANCE

"It is a foolish thing," said I,
"To bear with such, and pass it by;
Yet so I do, I know not why!"
And at each clash I would surmise
That if I had acted otherwise
I might have saved me many sighs.
But now the only happiness
In looking back that I possess -
Whose lack would leave me comfortless -

Is to remember I refrained
From masteries I might have gained,
And for my tolerance was disdained;
For see, a tomb. And if it were
I had bent and broke, I should not dare
To linger in the shadows there.

BEFORE AND AFTER SUMMER

I

Looking forward to the spring
One puts up with anything.
On this February day,
Though the winds leap down the street,
Wintry scourgings seem but play,
And these later shafts of sleet
— Sharper pointed than the first -
And these later snows — the worst -
Are as a half-transparent blind
Riddled by rays from sun behind.

II

Shadows of the October pine
Reach into this room of mine:
On the pine there stands a bird;
He is shadowed with the tree.
Mutely perched he bills no word;
Blank as I am even is he.
For those happy suns are past,
Fore-discerned in winter last.
When went by their pleasure, then?
I, alas, perceived not when.

AT DAY-CLOSE IN NOVEMBER

The ten hours' light is abating,
And a late bird flies across,
Where the pines, like waltzers waiting,
Give their black heads a toss.

Beech leaves, that yellow the noon-time,
Float past like specks in the eye;
I set every tree in my June time,
And now they obscure the sky.
And the children who ramble through here
Conceive that there never has been
A time when no tall trees grew here,
A time when none will be seen.

THE YEAR'S AWAKENING

How do you know that the pilgrim track
Along the belting zodiac
Swept by the sun in his seeming rounds
Is traced by now to the Fishes' bounds
And into the Ram, when weeks of cloud
Have wrapt the sky in a clammy shroud,
And never as yet a tinct of spring
Has shown in the Earth's apparelling;
O vespering bird, how do you know,
How do you know?
How do you know, deep underground,
Hid in your bed from sight and sound,
Without a turn in temperature,
With weather life can scarce endure,
That light has won a fraction's strength,
And day put on some moments' length,
Whereof in merest rote will come,
Weeks hence, mild airs that do not numb;
O crocus root, how do you know,
How do you know?
February 1910.

UNDER THE WATERFALL

"Whenever I plunge my arm, like this,
In a basin of water, I never miss
The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day
Fetched back from its thickening shroud of gray.
Hence the only prime
And real love-rhyme
That I know by heart,
And that leaves no smart,
Is the purl of a little valley fall
About three spans wide and two spans tall
Over a table of solid rock,
And into a scoop of the self-same block;
The purl of a runlet that never ceases
In stir of kingdoms, in wars, in peaces;
With a hollow boiling voice it speaks
And has spoken since hills were turfless peaks."

"And why gives this the only prime
Idea to you of a real love-rhyme?
And why does plunging your arm in a bowl
Full of spring water, bring throbs to your soul?
Well, under the fall, in a crease of the stone,
Though where precisely none ever has known,
Jammed darkly, nothing to show how prized,
And by now with its smoothness opalised,
Is a drinking-glass:
For, down that pass
My lover and I
Walked under a sky
Of blue with a leaf-woven awning of green,
In the burn of August, to paint the scene,
And we placed our basket of fruit and wine
By the runlet's rim, where we sat to dine;
And when we had drunk from the glass together,
Arched by the oak-copse from the weather,
I held the vessel to rinse in the fall,
Where it slipped, and sank, and was past recall,
Though we stooped and plumbed the little abyss
With long bared arms. There the glass still is.
And, as said, if I thrust my arm below
Cold water in basin or bowl, a throe
From the past awakens a sense of that time,
And the glass both used, and the cascade's rhyme.
The basin seems the pool, and its edge
The hard smooth face of the brook-side ledge,
And the leafy pattern of china-ware
The hanging plants that were bathing there.
By night, by day, when it shines or lours,
There lies intact that chalice of ours,
And its presence adds to the rhyme of love
Persistently sung by the fall above.
No lip has touched it since his and mine
In turns therefrom sipped lovers' wine."

THE SPELL OF THE ROSE

”I mean to build a hall anon,
And shape two turrets there,
And a broad newelled stair,
And a cool well for crystal water;
Yes; I will build a hall anon,
Plant roses love shall feed upon,
And apple trees and pear.”
He set to build the manor-hall,
And shaped the turrets there,
And the broad newelled stair,
And the cool well for crystal water;
He built for me that manor-hall,
And planted many trees withal,
But no rose anywhere.
And as he planted never a rose
That bears the flower of love,
Though other flowers throve
A frost-wind moved our souls to sever
Since he had planted never a rose;
And misconceits raised horrid shows,
And agonies came thereof.
”I’ll mend these miseries,” then said I,
And so, at dead of night,
I went and, screened from sight,
That nought should keep our souls in severance,
I set a rose-bush. “This,” said I,
”May end divisions dire and wry,
And long-drawn days of blight.”
But I was called from earth — yea, called
Before my rose-bush grew;
And would that now I knew
What feels he of the tree I planted,
And whether, after I was called
To be a ghost, he, as of old,
Gave me his heart anew!

Perhaps now blooms that queen of trees
I set but saw not grow,
And he, beside its glow -
Eyes couched of the mis-vision that blurred me -
Ay, there beside that queen of trees
He sees me as I was, though sees
Too late to tell me so!

ST. LAUNCE'S REVISITED

Slip back, Time!
Yet again I am nearing
Castle and keep, uprearing
Gray, as in my prime.
At the inn
Smiling close, why is it
Not as on my visit
When hope and I were twin?
Groom and jade
Whom I found here, moulder;
Strange the tavern-holder,
Strange the tap-maid.
Here I hired
Horse and man for bearing
Me on my wayfaring
To the door desired.
Evening gloomed
As I journeyed forward
To the faces shoreward,
Till their dwelling loomed.
If again
Towards the Atlantic sea there
I should speed, they'd be there
Surely now as then? . . .
Why waste thought,
When I know them vanished
Under earth; yea, banished
Ever into nought.
POEMS OF 1912-13
Veteris vestigia flammae

THE GOING

Why did you give no hint that night
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
You would close your term here, up and be gone
Where I could not follow
With wing of swallow
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!
Never to bid good-bye,
Or give me the softest call,
Or utter a wish for a word, while I
Saw morning harden upon the wall,
Unmoved, unknowing
That your great going
Had place that moment, and altered all.
Why do you make me leave the house
And think for a breath it is you I see
At the end of the alley of bending boughs
Where so often at dusk you used to be;
Till in darkening dankness
The yawning blankness
Of the perspective sickens me!
You were she who abode
By those red-veined rocks far West,
You were the swan-necked one who rode
Along the beetling Beeny Crest,
And, reining nigh me,
Would muse and eye me,
While Life unrolled us its very best.
Why, then, latterly did we not speak,
Did we not think of those days long dead,
And ere your vanishing strive to seek
That time's renewal? We might have said,
"In this bright spring weather
We'll visit together
Those places that once we visited."

Well, well! All's past amend,
Unchangeable. It must go.
I seem but a dead man held on end
To sink down soon . . . O you could not know
That such swift fleeing
No soul foreseeing -
Not even I — would undo me so!
December 1912.

YOUR LAST DRIVE

Here by the moorway you returned,
And saw the borough lights ahead
That lit your face — all undiscerned
To be in a week the face of the dead,
And you told of the charm of that haloed view
That never again would beam on you.
And on your left you passed the spot
Where eight days later you were to lie,
And be spoken of as one who was not;
Beholding it with a cursory eye
As alien from you, though under its tree
You soon would halt everlastingly.
I drove not with you . . . Yet had I sat
At your side that eve I should not have seen
That the countenance I was glancing at
Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen,
Nor have read the writing upon your face,
"I go hence soon to my resting-place;
"You may miss me then. But I shall not know
How many times you visit me there,
Or what your thoughts are, or if you go
There never at all. And I shall not care.
Should you censure me I shall take no heed
And even your praises I shall not need."
True: never you'll know. And you will not mind.
But shall I then slight you because of such?
Dear ghost, in the past did you ever find
The thought "What profit?" move me much
Yet the fact indeed remains the same,
You are past love, praise, indifference, blame.

December 1912.

THE WALK

You did not walk with me
Of late to the hill-top tree
By the gated ways,
As in earlier days;
You were weak and lame,
So you never came,
And I went alone, and I did not mind,
Not thinking of you as left behind.
I walked up there to-day
Just in the former way:
Surveyed around
The familiar ground
By myself again:
What difference, then?
Only that underlying sense
Of the look of a room on returning thence.

RAIN ON A GRAVE

Clouds spout upon her
Their waters amain
In ruthless disdain, -
Her who but lately
Had shivered with pain
As at touch of dishonour
If there had lit on her
So coldly, so straightly
Such arrows of rain.

She who to shelter
Her delicate head
Would quicken and quicken
Each tentative tread
If drops chanced to pelt her
That summertime spills
In dust-paven rills
When thunder-clouds thicken
And birds close their bills.
Would that I lay there
And she were housed here!
Or better, together
Were folded away there
Exposed to one weather
We both, — who would stray there
When sunny the day there,
Or evening was clear
At the prime of the year.
Soon will be growing
Green blades from her mound,
And daises be showing
Like stars on the ground,
Till she form part of them -
Ay — the sweet heart of them,
Loved beyond measure
With a child's pleasure
All her life's round.
Jan. 31, 1913.

I FOUND HER OUT THERE

I found her out there
On a slope few see,
That falls westwardly
To the salt-edged air,
Where the ocean breaks
On the purple strand,
And the hurricane shakes
The solid land.

I brought her here,
And have laid her to rest
In a noiseless nest
No sea beats near.
She will never be stirred
In her loamy cell
By the waves long heard
And loved so well.
So she does not sleep
By those haunted heights
The Atlantic smites
And the blind gales sweep,
Whence she often would gaze
At Dundagel's far head,
While the dipping blaze
Dyed her face fire-red;
And would sigh at the tale
Of sunk Lyonnesse,
As a wind-tugged tress
Flapped her cheek like a flail;
Or listen at whiles
With a thought-bound brow
To the murmuring miles
She is far from now.
Yet her shade, maybe,
Will creep underground
Till it catch the sound
Of that western sea
As it swells and sobs
Where she once domiciled,
And joy in its throbs
With the heart of a child.

WITHOUT CEREMONY

It was your way, my dear,
To be gone without a word
When callers, friends, or kin
Had left, and I hastened in
To rejoin you, as I inferred.

And when you'd a mind to career
Off anywhere — say to town -
You were all on a sudden gone
Before I had thought thereon,
Or noticed your trunks were down.
So, now that you disappear
For ever in that swift style,
Your meaning seems to me
Just as it used to be:
"Good-bye is not worth while!"

LAMENT

How she would have loved
A party to-day! -
Bright-hatted and gloved,
With table and tray
And chairs on the lawn
Her smiles would have shone
With welcomings . . . But
She is shut, she is shut
From friendship's spell
In the jailing shell
Of her tiny cell.
Or she would have reigned
At a dinner to-night
With ardours unfeigned,
And a generous delight;
All in her abode
She'd have freely bestowed
On her guests . . . But alas,
She is shut under grass
Where no cups flow,
Powerless to know
That it might be so.

And she would have sought
With a child's eager glance
The shy snowdrops brought
By the new year's advance,
And peered in the rime
Of Candlemas-time
For crocuses . . . chanced
It that she were not tranced
From sights she loved best;
Wholly possessed
By an infinite rest!
And we are here staying
Amid these stale things
Who care not for gaying,
And those junketings
That used so to joy her,
And never to cloy her
As us they cloy! . . . But
She is shut, she is shut
From the cheer of them, dead
To all done and said
In a yew-arched bed.

THE HAUNTER

He does not think that I haunt here nightly:
How shall I let him know
That whither his fancy sets him wandering
I, too, alertly go? -
Hover and hover a few feet from him
Just as I used to do,
But cannot answer his words addressed me -
Only listen thereto!
When I could answer he did not say them:
When I could let him know
How I would like to join in his journeys
Seldom he wished to go.
Now that he goes and wants me with him
More than he used to do,
Never he sees my faithful phantom
Though he speaks thereto.

Yes, I accompany him to places
Only dreamers know,
Where the shy hares limp long paces,
Where the night rooks go;
Into old aisles where the past is all to him,
Close as his shade can do,
Always lacking the power to call to him,
Near as I reach thereto!
What a good haunter I am, O tell him,
Quickly make him know
If he but sigh since my loss befell him
Straight to his side I go.
Tell him a faithful one is doing
All that love can do
Still that his path may be worth pursuing,
And to bring peace thereto.

THE VOICE

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.
Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!
Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever consigned to existlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?
Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward
And the woman calling.
December 1912.

HIS VISITOR

I come across from Mellstock while the moon wastes weaker
To behold where I lived with you for twenty years and more:
I shall go in the gray, at the passing of the mail-train,
And need no setting open of the long familiar door
As before.

The change I notice in my once own quarters!
A brilliant budded border where the daisies used to be,
The rooms new painted, and the pictures altered,
And other cups and saucers, and no cozy nook for tea
As with me.

I discern the dim faces of the sleep-wrapt servants;
They are not those who tended me through feeble hours and strong,
But strangers quite, who never knew my rule here,
Who never saw me painting, never heard my softling song
Float along.

So I don't want to linger in this re-decked dwelling,
I feel too uneasy at the contrasts I behold,
And I make again for Mellstock to return here never,
And rejoin the roomy silence, and the mute and manifold
Souls of old.

1913

A CIRCULAR

As "legal representative"
I read a missive not my own,
On new designs the senders give
For clothes, in tints as shown.

Here figure blouses, gowns for tea,
And presentation-trains of state,
Charming ball-dresses, millinery,
Warranted up to date.

And this gay-pictured, spring-time shout
Of Fashion, hails what lady proud?
Her who before last year was out
Was costumed in a shroud.

A DREAM OR NO

Why go to Saint-Juliot? What's Juliot to me?
I was but made fancy
By some necromancy
That much of my life claims the spot as its key.
Yes. I have had dreams of that place in the West,
And a maiden abiding
Thereat as in hiding;
Fair-eyed and white-shouldered, broad-browed and brown-tressed.
And of how, coastward bound on a night long ago,
There lonely I found her,
The sea-birds around her,
And other than nigh things uncaring to know.
So sweet her life there (in my thought has it seemed)
That quickly she drew me
To take her unto me,
And lodge her long years with me. Such have I dreamed.
But nought of that maid from Saint-Juliot I see;
Can she ever have been here,
And shed her life's sheen here,
The woman I thought a long housemate with me?
Does there even a place like Saint-Juliot exist?
Or a Vallency Valley
With stream and leafed alley,
Or Beeny, or Bos with its flounce flinging mist?
February 1913.

AFTER A JOURNEY

Hereto I come to interview a ghost;
Whither, O whither will its whim now draw me?
Up the cliff, down, till I'm lonely, lost,
And the unseen waters' ejaculations awe me.
Where you will next be there's no knowing,
Facing round about me everywhere,
With your nut-coloured hair,
And gray eyes, and rose-flush coming and going.

Yes: I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;
Through the years, through the dead scenes I have tracked you;
What have you now found to say of our past -
Viewed across the dark space wherein I have lacked you?
Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division?
Things were not lastly as firstly well
With us twain, you tell?
But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.

I see what you are doing: you are leading me on
To the spots we knew when we haunted here together,
The waterfall, above which the mist-bow shone
At the then fair hour in the then fair weather,
And the cave just under, with a voice still so hollow
That it seems to call out to me from forty years ago,
When you were all aglow,
And not the thin ghost that I now frailly follow!

Ignorant of what there is flitting here to see,
The waked birds preen and the seals flop lazily,
Soon you will have, Dear, to vanish from me,
For the stars close their shutters and the dawn whitens hazily.
Trust me, I mind not, though Life lours,
The bringing me here; nay, bring me here again!
I am just the same as when
Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers.

PENTARGAN BAY.

A DEATH-DAY RECALLED

Beeny did not quiver,
Juliot grew not gray,
Thin Valency's river
Held its wonted way.
Bos seemed not to utter
Dimmest note of dirge,
Targan mouth a mutter
To its creamy surge.

Yet though these, unheeding,
Listless, passed the hour
Of her spirit's speeding,
She had, in her flower,
Sought and loved the places -
Much and often pined
For their lonely faces
When in towns confined.
Why did not Valency
In his purl deplore
One whose haunts were whence he
Drew his limpid store?
Why did Bos not thunder,
Targan apprehend
Body and breath were sunder
Of their former friend?

BEENY CLIFF

March 1870 — March 1913

I

O the opal and the sapphire of that wandering western sea,
And the woman riding high above with bright hair flapping free -
The woman whom I loved so, and who loyally loved me.

II

The pale mews plained below us, and the waves seemed far away
In a nether sky, engrossed in saying their ceaseless babbling say,
As we laughed light-heartedly aloft on that clear-sunned March day.

III

A little cloud then cloaked us, and there flew an irised rain,
And the Atlantic dyed its levels with a dull misfeatured stain,
And then the sun burst out again, and purples prinked the main.

IV

— Still in all its chasmal beauty bulks old Beeny to the sky,
And shall she and I not go there once again now March is nigh,
And the sweet things said in that March say anew there by and by?

V

What if still in chasmal beauty looms that wild weird western shore,
The woman now is — elsewhere — whom the ambling pony bore,
And nor knows nor cares for Beeny, and will see it nevermore.

AT CASTLE BOTEREL

As I drive to the junction of lane and highway,
And the drizzle bedrenches the waggonette,
I look behind at the fading byway,
And see on its slope, now glistening wet,
Distinctly yet
Myself and a girlish form benighted
In dry March weather. We climb the road
Beside a chaise. We had just alighted
To ease the sturdy pony's load
When he sighed and slowed.
What we did as we climbed, and what we talked of
Matters not much, nor to what it led, -
Something that life will not be balked of
Without rude reason till hope is dead,
And feeling fled.
It filled but a minute. But was there ever
A time of such quality, since or before,
In that hill's story? To one mind never,
Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,
By thousands more.
Primaeval rocks form the road's steep border,
And much have they faced there, first and last,
Of the transitory in Earth's long order;
But what they record in colour and cast
Is — that we two passed.

And to me, though Time's unflinching rigour,
In mindless rote, has ruled from sight
The substance now, one phantom figure
Remains on the slope, as when that night
Saw us alight.

I look and see it there, shrinking, shrinking,
I look back at it amid the rain
For the very last time; for my sand is sinking,
And I shall traverse old love's domain
Never again.

March 1913.

PLACES

Nobody says: Ah, that is the place
Where chanced, in the hollow of years ago,
What none of the Three Towns cared to know —
The birth of a little girl of grace -
The sweetest the house saw, first or last;
Yet it was so
On that day long past.

Nobody thinks: There, there she lay
In a room by the Hoe, like the bud of a flower,
And listened, just after the bedtime hour,
To the stammering chimes that used to play
The quaint Old Hundred-and-Thirteenth tune
In Saint Andrew's tower
Night, morn, and noon.

Nobody calls to mind that here
Upon Boterel Hill, where the carters skid,
With cheeks whose airy flush outbid
Fresh fruit in bloom, and free of fear,
She cantered down, as if she must fall
(Though she never did),
To the charm of all.

Nay: one there is to whom these things,
That nobody else's mind calls back,
Have a savour that scenes in being lack,
And a presence more than the actual brings;
To whom to-day is beneaped and stale,
And its urgent clack
But a vapid tale.

PLYMOUTH, March 1913.

THE PHANTOM HORSEWOMAN

I

Queer are the ways of a man I know:
He comes and stands
In a careworn craze,
And looks at the sands
And the seaward haze,
With moveless hands
And face and gaze,
Then turns to go . . .
And what does he see when he gazes so?

II

They say he sees as an instant thing
More clear than to-day,
A sweet soft scene
That once was in play
By that briny green;
Yes, notes alway
Warm, real, and keen,
What his back years bring -
A phantom of his own figuring.

III

Of this vision of his they might say more:
Not only there
Does he see this sight,
But everywhere
In his brain — day, night,
As if on the air
It were drawn rose bright -
Yea, far from that shore
Does he carry this vision of heretofore:

IV

A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,
He withers daily,
Time touches her not,
But she still rides gaily
In his rapt thought
On that shagged and shaly
Atlantic spot,
And as when first eyed
Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES

THE WISTFUL LADY

'Love, while you were away there came to me -
From whence I cannot tell -
A plaintive lady pale and passionless,
Who bent her eyes upon me critically,
And weighed me with a wearing wistfulness,
As if she knew me well."

"I saw no lady of that wistful sort
As I came riding home.
Perhaps she was some dame the Fates constrain
By memories sadder than she can support,
Or by unhappy vacancy of brain,
To leave her roof and roam?"

"Ah, but she knew me. And before this time
I have seen her, lending ear
To my light outdoor words, and pondering each,
Her frail white finger swayed in pantomime,
As if she fain would close with me in speech,
And yet would not come near.
"And once I saw her beckoning with her hand
As I came into sight
At an upper window. And I at last went out;
But when I reached where she had seemed to stand,
And wandered up and down and searched about,
I found she had vanished quite."
Then thought I how my dead Love used to say,
With a small smile, when she
Was waning wan, that she would hover round
And show herself after her passing day
To any newer Love I might have found,
But show her not to me.

THE WOMAN IN THE RYE

"Why do you stand in the dripping rye,
Cold-lipped, unconscious, wet to the knee,
When there are firesides near?" said I.
"I told him I wished him dead," said she.
"Yea, cried it in my haste to one
Whom I had loved, whom I well loved still;
And die he did. And I hate the sun,
And stand here lonely, aching, chill;
"Stand waiting, waiting under skies
That blow reproach, the while I see
The rooks sheer off to where he lies
Wrapt in a peace withheld from me."

THE CHEVAL-GLASS

Why do you harbour that great cheval-glass
Filling up your narrow room?
You never preen or plume,
Or look in a week at your full-length figure -
Picture of bachelor gloom!
"Well, when I dwelt in ancient England,
Renting the valley farm,
Thoughtless of all heart-harm,
I used to gaze at the parson's daughter,
A creature of nameless charm.
"Thither there came a lover and won her,
Carried her off from my view.
O it was then I knew
Misery of a cast undreamt of -
More than, indeed, my due!
"Then far rumours of her ill-usage
Came, like a chilling breath
When a man languisheth;
Followed by news that her mind lost balance,
And, in a space, of her death.
"Soon sank her father; and next was the auction -
Everything to be sold:
Mid things new and old
Stood this glass in her former chamber,
Long in her use, I was told.
"Well, I awaited the sale and bought it . . .
There by my bed it stands,
And as the dawn expands
Often I see her pale-faced form there
Brushing her hair's bright bands.
"There, too, at pallid midnight moments
Quick she will come to my call,
Smile from the frame withal
Ponderingly, as she used to regard me
Passing her father's wall.
"So that it was for its revelations
I brought it oversea,
And drag it about with me . . .
Anon I shall break it and bury its fragments
Where my grave is to be."

THE RE-ENACTMENT

Between the folding sea-downs,
In the gloom
Of a wailful wintry nightfall,
When the boom
Of the ocean, like a hammering in a hollow tomb,
Throbbed up the copse-clothed valley
From the shore
To the chamber where I darkled,
Sunk and sore
With gray ponderings why my Loved one had not come before
To salute me in the dwelling
That of late
I had hired to waste a while in -
Vague of date,
Quaint, and remote — wherein I now expectant sate;
On the solitude, unsignalled,
Broke a man
Who, in air as if at home there,
Seemed to scan
Every fire-flecked nook of the apartment span by span.
A stranger's and no lover's
Eyes were these,
Eyes of a man who measures
What he sees
But vaguely, as if wrapt in filmy phantasies.
Yea, his bearing was so absent
As he stood,
It bespoke a chord so plaintive
In his mood,
That soon I judged he would not wrong my quietude.
"Ah — the supper is just ready,"
Then he said,
"And the years'-long binned Madeira
Flashes red!"
(There was no wine, no food, no supper-table spread.)
"You will forgive my coming,
Lady fair?
I see you as at that time
Rising there,
The self-same curious querying in your eyes and air.

"Yet no. How so? You wear not
The same gown,
Your locks show woful difference,
Are not brown:
What, is it not as when I hither came from town?
"And the place . . . But you seem other -
Can it be?
What's this that Time is doing
Unto me?
YOU dwell here, unknown woman? . . . Whereabouts, then, is she?
"And the house — things are much shifted. -
Put them where
They stood on this night's fellow;
Shift her chair:
Here was the couch: and the piano should be there."
I indulged him, verily nerve-strained
Being alone,
And I moved the things as bidden,
One by one,
And feigned to push the old piano where he had shown.
"Aha — now I can see her!
Stand aside:
Don't thrust her from the table
Where, meek-eyed,
She makes attempt with matron-manners to preside.
"She serves me: now she rises,
Goes to play . . .
But you obstruct her, fill her
With dismay,
And embarrassed, scared, she vanishes away!"
And, as 'twere useless longer
To persist,
He sighed, and sought the entry
Ere I wist,
And retreated, disappearing soundless in the mist.
That here some mighty passion
Once had burned,
Which still the walls enghosted,
I discerned,
And that by its strong spell mine might be overturned.

I sat depressed; till, later,
My Love came;
But something in the chamber
Dimmed our flame, -
An emanation, making our due words fall tame,
As if the intenser drama
Shown me there
Of what the walls had witnessed
Filled the air,
And left no room for later passion anywhere.
So came it that our fervours
Did quite fail
Of future consummation -
Being made quail
By the weird witchery of the parlour's hidden tale,
Which I, as years passed, faintly
Learnt to trace, -
One of sad love, born full-winged
In that place
Where the predestined sorrowers first stood face to face.
And as that month of winter
Circles round,
And the evening of the date-day
Grows embrowned,
I am conscious of those presences, and sit spellbound.
There, often — lone, forsaken -
Queries breed
Within me; whether a phantom
Had my heed
On that strange night, or was it some wrecked heart indeed?

HER SECRET

That love's dull smart distressed my heart
He shrewdly learnt to see,
But that I was in love with a dead man
Never suspected he.
He searched for the trace of a pictured face,
He watched each missive come,
And a note that seemed like a love-line
Made him look frozen and glum.

He dogged my feet to the city street,
He followed me to the sea,
But not to the neighbouring churchyard
Did he dream of following me.

SHE CHARGED ME

She charged me with having said this and that
To another woman long years before,
In the very parlour where we sat, -
Sat on a night when the endless pour
Of rain on the roof and the road below
Bent the spring of the spirit more and more . . .

- So charged she me; and the Cupid's bow
  Of her mouth was hard, and her eyes, and her face,
  And her white forefinger lifted slow.

Had she done it gently, or shown a trace
That not too curiously would she view
A folly passed ere her reign had place,
A kiss might have ended it. But I knew
From the fall of each word, and the pause between,
That the curtain would drop upon us two
Ere long, in our play of slave and queen.

THE NEWCOMER'S WIFE

He paused on the sill of a door ajar
That screened a lively liquor-bar,
For the name had reached him through the door
Of her he had married the week before.
"We called her the Hack of the Parade;
But she was discreet in the games she played;
If slightly worn, she's pretty yet,
And gossips, after all, forget.
"And he knows nothing of her past;
I am glad the girl's in luck at last;
Such ones, though stale to native eyes,
Newcomers snatch at as a prize."

"Yes, being a stranger he sees her blent
Of all that's fresh and innocent,
Nor dreams how many a love-campaign
She had enjoyed before his reign!"
That night there was the splash of a fall
Over the slimy harbour-wall:
They searched, and at the deepest place
Found him with crabs upon his face.

A CONVERSATION AT DAWN

He lay awake, with a harassed air,
And she, in her cloud of loose lank hair,
Seemed trouble-tried
As the dawn drew in on their faces there.
The chamber looked far over the sea
From a white hotel on a white-stoned quay,
And stepping a stride
He parted the window-drapery.
Above the level horizon spread
The sunrise, firing them foot to head
From its smouldering lair,
And painting their pillows with dyes of red.
"What strange disquiets have stirred you, dear,
This dragging night, with starts in fear
Of me, as it were,
Or of something evil hovering near?"
"My husband, can I have fear of you?
What should one fear from a man whom few,
Or none, had matched
In that late long spell of delays undue!"
He watched her eyes in the heaving sun:
"Then what has kept, O reticent one,
Those lids unlatched -
Anything promised I've not yet done?"
"O it's not a broken promise of yours
(For what quite lightly your lip assures
The due time brings)
That has troubled my sleep, and no waking cures!" . . .

"I have shaped my will; 'tis at hand," said he;
"I subscribe it to-day, that no risk there be
In the hap of things
Of my leaving you menaced by poverty."
"That a boon provision I'm safe to get,
Signed, sealed by my lord as it were a debt,
I cannot doubt,
Or ever this peering sun be set."
"But you flung my arms away from your side,
And faced the wall. No month-old bride
Ere the tour be out
In an air so loth can be justified?
"Ah — had you a male friend once loved well,
Upon whose suit disaster fell
And frustrance swift?
Honest you are, and may care to tell."
She lay impassive, and nothing broke
The stillness other than, stroke by stroke,
The lazy lift
Of the tide below them; till she spoke:
"I once had a friend — a Love, if you will -
Whose wife forsook him, and sank until
She was made a thrall
In a prison-cell for a deed of ill . . .
"He remained alone; and we met — to love,
But barring legitimate joy thereof
Stood a doorless wall,
Though we prized each other all else above.
"And this was why, though I'd touched my prime,
I put off suitors from time to time -
Yourself with the rest -
Till friends, who approved you, called it crime,
"And when misgivings weighed on me
In my lover's absence, hurriedly,
And much distrest,
I took you . . . Ah, that such could be! . . .
"Now, saw you when crossing from yonder shore
At yesternoon, that the packet bore
On a white-wreathed bier
A coffined body towards the fore?

"Well, while you stood at the other end,
The loungers talked, and I could but lend
A listening ear,
For they named the dead. 'Twas the wife of my friend.
"He was there, but did not note me, veiled,
Yet I saw that a joy, as of one unjailed,
Now shone in his gaze;
He knew not his hope of me just had failed!
"They had brought her home: she was born in this isle;
And he will return to his domicile,
And pass his days
Alone, and not as he dreamt erstwhile!"
" — So you've lost a sprucer spouse than I!"
She held her peace, as if fain deny
She would indeed
For his pleasure's sake, but could lip no lie.
"One far less formal and plain and slow!"
She let the laconic assertion go
As if of need
She held the conviction that it was so.
"Regard me as his he always should,
He had said, and wed me he vowed he would
In his prime or sere
Most verily do, if ever he could.
"And this fulfilment is now his aim,
For a letter, addressed in my maiden name,
Has dogged me here,
Reminding me faithfully of his claim.
"And it started a hope like a lightning-streak
That I might go to him — say for a week -
And afford you right
To put me away, and your vows unspeak.
"To be sure you have said, as of dim intent,
That marriage is a plain event
Of black and white,
Without any ghost of sentiment,
"And my heart has quailed. — But deny it true
That you will never this lock undo!
No God intends
To thwart the yearning He's father to!"

The husband hemmed, then blandly bowed
In the light of the angry morning cloud.
"So my idyll ends,
And a drama opens!" he mused aloud;
And his features froze. "You may take it as true
That I will never this lock undo
For so depraved
A passion as that which kindles you."
Said she: "I am sorry you see it so;
I had hoped you might have let me go,
And thus been saved
The pain of learning there's more to know."
"More? What may that be? Gad, I think
You have told me enough to make me blink!
Yet if more remain
Then own it to me. I will not shrink!"
"Well, it is this. As we could not see
That a legal marriage could ever be,
To end our pain
We united ourselves informally;
"And vowed at a chancel-altar nigh,
With book and ring, a lifelong tie;
A contract vain
To the world, but real to Him on High."
"And you became as his wife?" — "I did." -
He stood as stiff as a caryatid,
And said, "Indeed! . . .
No matter. You're mine, whatever you ye hid!"
"But is it right! When I only gave
My hand to you in a sweat to save,
Through desperate need
(As I thought), my fame, for I was not brave!"
"To save your fame? Your meaning is dim,
For nobody knew of your altar-whim?"
"I mean — I feared
There might be fruit of my tie with him;
"And to cloak it by marriage I'm not the first,
Though, maybe, morally most accurst
Through your unpeered
And strict uprightness. That's the worst!

"While yesterday his worn contours
Convinced me that love like his endures,
And that my troth-plight
Had been his, in fact, and not truly yours."
"So, my lady, you raise the veil by degrees . . .
I own this last is enough to freeze
The warmest wight!
Now hear the other side, if you please:
"I did say once, though without intent,
That marriage is a plain event
Of black and white,
Whatever may be its sentiment.
"I'll act accordingly, none the less
That you soiled the contract in time of stress,
Thereto induced
By the feared results of your wantonness.
"But the thing is over, and no one knows,
And it's nought to the future what you disclose.
That you'll be loosed
For such an episode, don't suppose!
"No: I'll not free you. And if it appear
There was too good ground for your first fear
From your amorous tricks,
I'll father the child. Yes, by God, my dear.
"Even should you fly to his arms, I'll damn
Opinion, and fetch you; treat as sham
Your mutinous kicks,
And whip you home. That's the sort I am!"
She whitened. "Enough . . . Since you disapprove
I'll yield in silence, and never move
Till my last pulse ticks
A footstep from the domestic groove."
"Then swear it," he said, "and your king uncrown."
He drew her forth in her long white gown,
And she knelt and swore.
"Good. Now you may go and again lie down
"Since you've played these pranks and given no sign,
You shall crave this man of yours; pine and pine
With sighings sore,
'Till I've starved your love for him; nailed you mine.

"I'm a practical man, and want no tears;
You've made a fool of me, it appears;
That you don't again
Is a lesson I'll teach you in future years."
She answered not, but lay listlessly
With her dark dry eyes on the coppery sea,
That now and then
Flung its lazy flounce at the neighbouring quay.
1910

A KING'S SOLILOQUY ON THE NIGHT OF HIS FUNERAL

From the slow march and muffled drum
And crowds distrest,
And book and bell, at length I have come
To my full rest.
A ten years' rule beneath the sun
Is wound up here,
And what I have done, what left undone,
Figures out clear.
Yet in the estimate of such
It grieves me more
That I by some was loved so much
Than that I bore,
From others, judgment of that hue
Which over-hope
Breeds from a theoretic view
Of regal scope.
For kingly opportunities
Right many have sighed;
How best to bear its devilries
Those learn who have tried!
I have eaten the fat and drunk the sweet,
Lived the life out
From the first greeting glad drum-beat
To the last shout.

What pleasure earth affords to kings
I have enjoyed
Through its long vivid pulse-stirrings
Even till it cloyed.
What days of drudgery, nights of stress
Can cark a throne,
Even one maintained in peacefulness,
I too have known.
And so, I think, could I step back
To life again,
I should prefer the average track
Of average men,
Since, as with them, what kingship would
It cannot do,
Nor to first thoughts however good
Hold itself true.
Something binds hard the royal hand,
As all that be,
And it is That has shaped, has planned
My acts and me.
May 1910.

THE CORONATION

At Westminster, hid from the light of day,
Many who once had shone as monarchs lay.
Edward the Pious, and two Edwards more,
The second Richard, Henrys three or four;
That is to say, those who were called the Third,
Fifth, Seventh, and Eighth (the much self-widowered),
And James the Scot, and near him Charles the Second,
And, too, the second George could there be reckoned.
Of women, Mary and Queen Elizabeth,
And Anne, all silent in a musing death;
And William's Mary, and Mary, Queen of Scots,
And consort-queens whose names oblivion blots;
And several more whose chronicle one sees
Adorning ancient royal pedigrees.

- Now, as they drowsed on, freed from Life's old thrall,
  And heedless, save of things exceptional,

Said one: "What means this throbbing thudding sound
That reaches to us here from overground;
"A sound of chisels, augers, planes, and saws,
Infringing all ecclesiastic laws?
"And these tons-weight of timber on us pressed,
Unfelt here since we entered into rest?
"Surely, at least to us, being corpses royal,
A meet repose is owing by the loyal?"
" — Perhaps a scaffold!" Mary Stuart sighed,
"If such still be. It was that way I died."
" — Ods! Far more like," said he the many-wived,
"That for a wedding 'tis this work's contrived.
"Ha-ha! I never would bow down to Rimmon,
But I had a rare time with those six women!"
"Not all at once?" gasped he who loved confession.
"Nay, nay!" said Hal. "That would have been transgression."
" — They build a catafalque here, black and tall,
Perhaps," mused Richard, "for some funeral?"
And Anne chimed in: "Ah, yes: it maybe so!"
"Nay!" squeaked Eliza. "Little you seem to know -
"Clearly 'tis for some crowning here in state,
As they crowned us at our long bygone date;
"Though we'd no such a power of carpentry,
But let the ancient architecture be;
"If I were up there where the parsons sit,
In one of my gold robes, I'd see to it!"
"But you are not," Charles chuckled. "You are here,
And never will know the sun again, my dear!"
"Yea," whispered those whom no one had addressed;
"With slow, sad march, amid a folk distressed,
We were brought here, to take our dusty rest.
"And here, alas, in darkness laid below,
We'll wait and listen, and endure the show . . .
Clamour dogs kingship; afterwards not so!"
1911

AQUAE SULIS

The chimes called midnight, just at interlune,
And the daytime talk of the Roman investigations
Was checked by silence, save for the husky tune
The bubbling waters played near the excavations.

And a warm air came up from underground,
And a flutter, as of a filmy shape unsepulchred,
That collected itself, and waited, and looked around:
Nothing was seen, but utterances could be heard:

Those of the goddess whose shrine was beneath the pile
Of the God with the baldachined altar overhead:
"And what did you get by raising this nave and aisle
Close on the site of the temple I tenanted?

"The notes of your organ have thrilled down out of view
To the earth-clogged wrecks of my edifice many a year,
Though stately and shining once — ay, long ere you
Had set up crucifix and candle here.

"Your priests have trampled the dust of mine without rueing,
Despising the joys of man whom I so much loved,
Though my springs boil on by your Gothic arcades and pewing,
And sculptures crude . . . Would Jove they could be removed!"

" — Repress, O lady proud, your traditional ires;
You know not by what a frail thread we equally hang;
It is said we are images both — twitched by people's desires;
And that I, like you, fail as a song men yesterday sang!"

* *

And the olden dark hid the cavities late laid bare,
And all was suspended and soundless as before,
Except for a gossamery noise fading off in the air,
And the boiling voice of the waters' medicinal pour.
BATH.

SEVENTY-FOUR AND TWENTY

Here goes a man of seventy-four,
Who sees not what life means for him,
And here another in years a score
Who reads its very figure and trim.
The one who shall walk to-day with me
Is not the youth who gazes far,
But the breezy wight who cannot see
What Earth's ingrained conditions are.

THE ELOPEMENT

"A woman never agreed to it!" said my knowing friend to me.
"That one thing she'd refuse to do for Solomon's mines in fee:
No woman ever will make herself look older than she is."
I did not answer; but I thought, "you err there, ancient Quiz."
It took a rare one, true, to do it; for she was surely rare -
As rare a soul at that sweet time of her life as she was fair.
And urging motives, too, were strong, for ours was a passionate case,
Yea, passionate enough to lead to freaking with that young face.
I have told no one about it, should perhaps make few believe,
But I think it over now that life looms dull and years bereave,
How blank we stood at our bright wits' end, two frail barks in distress,
How self-regard in her was slain by her large tenderness.
I said: "The only chance for us in a crisis of this kind
Is going it thorough!" — "Yes," she calmly breathed. "Well, I don't mind."
And we blanched her dark locks ruthlessly: set wrinkles on her brow;
Ay — she was a right rare woman then, whatever she may be now.

That night we heard a coach drive up, and questions asked below.
"A gent with an elderly wife, sir," was returned from the bureau.
And the wheels went rattling on, and free at last from public ken
We washed all off in her chamber and restored her youth again.

How many years ago it was! Some fifty can it be
Since that adventure held us, and she played old wife to me?
But in time convention won her, as it wins all women at last,
And now she is rich and respectable, and time has buried the past.

I ROSE UP AS MY CUSTOM IS

I rose up as my custom is
On the eve of All-Souls' day,
And left my grave for an hour or so
To call on those I used to know
Before I passed away.

I visited my former Love
As she lay by her husband's side;
I asked her if life pleased her, now
She was rid of a poet wrung in brow,
And crazed with the ills he eyed;

Who used to drag her here and there
Wherever his fancies led,
And point out pale phantasmal things,
And talk of vain vague purposings
That she discredited.

She was quite civil, and replied,
"Old comrade, is that you?
Well, on the whole, I like my life. -
I know I swore I'd be no wife,
But what was I to do?

"You see, of all men for my sex
A poet is the worst;
Women are practical, and they
Crave the wherewith to pay their way,
And slake their social thirst.

"You were a poet — quite the ideal
That we all love awhile:
But look at this man snoring here -
He's no romantic chanticleer,
Yet keeps me in good style.

"He makes no quest into my thoughts,
But a poet wants to know
What one has felt from earliest days,
Why one thought not in other ways,
And one's Loves of long ago."
Her words benumbed my fond frail ghost;
The nightmares neighed from their stalls
The vampires screeched, the harpies flew,
And under the dim dawn I withdrew
To Death's inviolate halls.

A WEEK

On Monday night I closed my door,
And thought you were not as heretofore,
And little cared if we met no more.
I seemed on Tuesday night to trace
Something beyond mere commonplace
In your ideas, and heart, and face.
On Wednesday I did not opine
Your life would ever be one with mine,
Though if it were we should well combine.
On Thursday noon I liked you well,
And fondly felt that we must dwell
Not far apart, whatever befell.
On Friday it was with a thrill
In gazing towards your distant vill
I owned you were my dear one still.
I saw you wholly to my mind
On Saturday — even one who shrined
All that was best of womankind.
As wing-clipt sea-gull for the sea
On Sunday night I longed for thee,
Without whom life were waste to me!

HAD YOU WEPT

Had you wept; had you but neared me with a frail uncertain ray,
Dewy as the face of the dawn, in your large and luminous eye,
Then would have come back all the joys the tidings had slain that day,
And a new beginning, a fresh fair heaven, have smoothed the things awry.
But you were less feebly human, and no passionate need for clinging
Possessed your soul to overthrow reserve when I came near;
Ay, though you suffer as much as I from storms the hours are bringing
Upon your heart and mine, I never see you shed a tear.

The deep strong woman is weakest, the weak one is the strong;
The weapon of all weapons best for winning, you have not used;
Have you never been able, or would you not, through the evil times and long?
Has not the gift been given you, or such gift have you refused?
When I bade me not absolve you on that evening or the morrow,
Why did you not make war on me with those who weep like rain?
You felt too much, so gained no balm for all your torrid sorrow,
And hence our deep division, and our dark undying pain.

BEREFT, SHE THINKS SHE DREAMS

I dream that the dearest I ever knew
Has died and been entombed.
I am sure it's a dream that cannot be true,
But I am so overgloomed
By its persistence, that I would gladly
Have quick death take me,
Rather than longer think thus sadly;
So wake me, wake me!

It has lasted days, but minute and hour
I expect to get aroused
And find him as usual in the bower
Where we so happily housed.
Yet stays this nightmare too appalling,
And like a web shakes me,
And piteously I keep on calling,
And no one wakes me!

IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

"What do you see in that time-touched stone,
When nothing is there
But ashen blankness, although you give it
A rigid stare?
"You look not quite as if you saw,
But as if you heard,
Parting your lips, and treading softly
As mouse or bird.
"It is only the base of a pillar, they'll tell you,
That came to us
From a far old hill men used to name
Areopagus."

- "I know no art, and I only view
  A stone from a wall,
  But I am thinking that stone has echoed
  The voice of Paul,

"Paul as he stood and preached beside it
Facing the crowd,
A small gaunt figure with wasted features,
Calling out loud
"Words that in all their intimate accents
Pattered upon
That marble front, and were far reflected,
And then were gone.
"I'm a labouring man, and know but little,
Or nothing at all;
But I can't help thinking that stone once echoed
The voice of Paul."

IN THE SERVANTS' QUARTERS

"Man, you too, aren't you, one of these rough followers of the criminal?
All hanging hereabout to gather how he's going to bear
Examination in the hall." She flung disdainful glances on
The shabby figure standing at the fire with others there,
Who warmed them by its flare.

"No indeed, my skipping maiden: I know nothing of the trial here,
Or criminal, if so he be. — I chanced to come this way,
And the fire shone out into the dawn, and morning airs are cold now;
I, too, was drawn in part by charms I see before me play,
That I see not every day."

"Ha, ha!" then laughed the constables who also stood to warm themselves,
The while another maiden scrutinized his features hard,
As the blaze threw into contrast every line and knot that wrinkled them,
Exclaiming, "Why, last night when he was brought in by the guard,
You were with him in the yard!"

"Nay, nay, you teasing wench, I say! You know you speak mistakenly.
Cannot a tired pedestrian who has footed it afar
Here on his way from northern parts, engrossed in humble marketings,
Come in and rest awhile, although judicial doings are
Afoot by morning star?"

"O, come, come!" laughed the constables. "Why, man, you speak the dialect
He uses in his answers; you can hear him up the stairs.
So own it. We sha'n't hurt ye. There he's speaking now! His syllables
Are those you sound yourself when you are talking unawares,
As this pretty girl declares."

"And you shudder when his chain clinks!" she rejoined. "O yes, I noticed it.
And you winced, too, when those cuffs they gave him echoed to us here.
They'll soon be coming down, and you may then have to defend yourself
Unless you hold your tongue, or go away and keep you clear
When he's led to judgment near!"

"No! I'll be damned in hell if I know anything about the man!
No single thing about him more than everybody knows!
Must not I even warm my hands but I am charged with blasphemies?" . . .
- His face convulses as the morning cock that moment crows,
And he stops, and turns, and goes.

THE OBLITERATE TOMB

"More than half my life long
Did they weigh me falsely, to my bitter wrong,
But they all have shrunk away into the silence
Like a lost song.
"And the day has dawned and come
For forgiveness, when the past may hold it dumb
On the once reverberate words of hatred uttered
Half in delirium . . .
"With folded lips and hands
They lie and wait what next the Will commands,
And doubtless think, if think they can: 'Let discord
Sink with Life's sands!'
"By these late years their names,
Their virtues, their hereditary claims,
May be as near defacement at their grave-place
As are their fames."
— Such thoughts bechanced to seize
A traveller's mind — a man of memories -
As he set foot within the western city
Where had died these
Who in their lifetime deemed
Him their chief enemy — one whose brain had schemed
To get their dingy greatness deeplier dingied
And disesteemed.
So, sojourning in their town,
He mused on them and on their once renown,
And said, "I'll seek their resting-place to-morrow
Ere I lie down,
"And end, lest I forget,
Those ires of many years that I regret,
Renew their names, that men may see some liegeness
Is left them yet."
Duly next day he went
And sought the church he had known them to frequent,
And wandered in the precincts, set on eyeing
Where they lay pent,
Till by remembrance led
He stood at length beside their slighted bed,
Above which, truly, scarce a line or letter
Could now be read.

"Thus years obliterate
Their graven worth, their chronicle, their date!
At once I'll garnish and revive the record
Of their past state,
"That still the sage may say
In pensive progress here where they decay,
'This stone records a luminous line whose talents
Told in their day.'"
While speaking thus he turned,
For a form shadowed where they lay inurned,
And he beheld a stranger in foreign vesture,
And tropic-burned.
"Sir, I am right pleased to view
That ancestors of mine should interest you,
For I have come of purpose here to trace them . . .
They are time-worn, true,
"But that's a fault, at most,
Sculptors can cure. On the Pacific coast
I have vowed for long that relics of my forbears
I'd trace ere lost,
"And hitherward I come,
Before this same old Time shall strike me numb,
To carry it out." — "Strange, this is!" said the other;
"What mind shall plumb
"Coincident design!
Though these my father's enemies were and mine,
I nourished a like purpose — to restore them
Each letter and line."
"Such magnanimity
Is now not needed, sir; for you will see
That since I am here, a thing like this is, plainly,
Best done by me."
The other bowed, and left,
Crestfallen in sentiment, as one bereft
Of some fair object he had been moved to cherish,
By hands more deft.
And as he slept that night
The phantoms of the ensepulchred stood up-right
Before him, trembling that he had set him seeking
Their charnel-site.

And, as unknowing his ruth,
Asked as with terrors founded not on truth
Why he should want them. “Ha,” they hollowly hackered,
”You come, forsooth,
”By stealth to obliterate
Our graven worth, our chronicle, our date,
That our descendant may not gild the record
Of our past state,
”And that no sage may say
In pensive progress near where we decay:
‘This stone records a luminous line whose talents
Told in their day.’“
Upon the morrow he went
And to that town and churchyard never bent
His ageing footsteps till, some twelvemonths onward,
An accident
Once more detained him there;
And, stirred by hauntings, he must needs repair
To where the tomb was. Lo, it stood still wasting
In no man’s care.
”The travelled man you met
The last time,” said the sexton, “has not yet
Appeared again, though wealth he had in plenty.
— Can he forget?
”The architect was hired
And came here on smart summons as desired,
But never the descendant came to tell him
What he required.”
And so the tomb remained
Untouched, untended, crumbling, weather-stained,
And though the one-time foe was fain to right it
He still refrained.
”I’ll set about it when
I am sure he’ll come no more. Best wait till then.”
But so it was that never the stranger entered
That city again.
And the well-meaner died
While waiting tremulously unsatisfied
That no return of the family’s foreign scion
Would still betide.

And many years slid by,
And active church-restorers cast their eye
Upon the ancient garth and hoary building
The tomb stood nigh.
And when they had scraped each wall,
Pulled out the stately pews, and smartened all,
"It will be well," declared the spruce church-warden,
"To overhaul
"And broaden this path where shown;
Nothing prevents it but an old tombstone
Pertaining to a family forgotten,
Of deeds unknown.
"Their names can scarce be read,
Depend on't, all who care for them are dead."
So went the tomb, whose shards were as path-paving
Distributed.
Over it and about
Men's footsteps beat, and wind and water-spout,
Until the names, aforetime gnawed by weathers,
Were quite worn out.
So that no sage can say
In pensive progress near where they decay,
"This stone records a luminous line whose talents
Told in their day."

REGRET NOT ME

Regret not me;
Beneath the sunny tree
I lie uncaring, slumbering peacefully.
Swift as the light
I flew my faery flight;
Ecstatically I moved, and feared no night.
I did not know
That heydays fade and go,
But deemed that what was would be always so.
I skipped at morn
Between the yellowing corn,
Thinking it good and glorious to be born.

I ran at eves
Among the piled-up sheaves,
Dreaming, "I grieve not, therefore nothing grieves."
Now soon will come
The apple, pear, and plum
And hinds will sing, and autumn insects hum.
Again you will fare
To cider-makings rare,
And junketings; but I shall not be there.
Yet gaily sing
Until the pewter ring
Those songs we sang when we went gipsying.
And lightly dance
Some triple-timed romance
In coupled figures, and forget mischance;
And mourn not me
Beneath the yellowing tree;
For I shall mind not, slumbering peacefully.

THE RECALCITRANTS

Let us off and search, and find a place
Where yours and mine can be natural lives,
Where no one comes who dissects and dives
And proclaims that ours is a curious case,
That its touch of romance can scarcely grace.
You would think it strange at first, but then
Everything has been strange in its time.
When some one said on a day of the prime
He would bow to no brazen god again
He doubtless dazed the mass of men.
None will recognize us as a pair whose claims
To righteous judgment we care not making;
Who have doubted if breath be worth the taking,
And have no respect for the current fames
Whence the savour has flown while abide the names.
We have found us already shunned, disdained,
And for re-acceptance have not once striven;
Whatever offence our course has given
The brunt thereof we have long sustained.
Well, let us away, scorned unexplained.

STARLINGS ON THE ROOF

"No smoke spreads out of this chimney-pot,
The people who lived here have left the spot,
And others are coming who knew them not.
If you listen anon, with an ear intent,
The voices, you'll find, will be different
From the well-known ones of those who went."
"Why did they go? Their tones so bland
Were quite familiar to our band;
The comers we shall not understand."
"They look for a new life, rich and strange;
They do not know that, let them range
Wherever they may, they will get no change.
"They will drag their house-gear ever so far
In their search for a home no miseries mar;
They will find that as they were they are,
"That every hearth has a ghost, alack,
And can be but the scene of a bivouac
Till they move perforce — no time to pack!"

THE MOON LOOKS IN

I

I have risen again,
And awhile survey
By my chilly ray
Through your window-pane
Your upturned face,
As you think, "Ah-she
Now dreams of me
In her distant place!"

II

I pierce her blind
In her far-off home:
She fixes a comb,
And says in her mind,
"I start in an hour;
Whom shall I meet?
Won't the men be sweet,
And the women sour!"

THE SWEET HUSSY

In his early days he was quite surprised
When she told him she was compromised
By meetings and lingerings at his whim,
And thinking not of herself but him;
While she lifted orbs aggrieved and round
That scandal should so soon abound,
(As she had raised them to nine or ten
Of antecedent nice young men)
And in remorse he thought with a sigh,
How good she is, and how bad am I! -
It was years before he understood
That she was the wicked one — he the good.

THE TELEGRAM

"O he's suffering — maybe dying — and I not there to aid,
And smooth his bed and whisper to him! Can I nohow go?
Only the nurse's brief twelve words thus hurriedly conveyed,
As by stealth, to let me know.

"He was the best and brightest! — candour shone upon his brow,
And I shall never meet again a soldier such as he,
And I loved him ere I knew it, and perhaps he's sinking now,
Far, far removed from me!"

- The yachts ride mute at anchor and the fulling moon is fair,
  And the giddy folk are strutting up and down the smooth parade,
  And in her wild distraction she seems not to be aware
  That she lives no more a maid,

But has vowed and wived herself to one who blessed the ground she trod
To and from his scene of ministry, and thought her history known
In its last particular to him — aye, almost as to God,
And believed her quite his own.
So great her absentmindedness she droops as in a swoon,
And a movement of aversion mars her recent spousal grace,
And in silence we two sit here in our waning honeymoon
At this idle watering-place . . .
What now I see before me is a long lane overhung
With lovelessness, and stretching from the present to the grave.
And I would I were away from this, with friends I knew when young,
Ere a woman held me slave.

THE MOTH-SIGNAL

(On Egdon Heath)
"What are you still, still thinking,"
He asked in vague surmise,
"That stare at the wick unblinking
With those great lost luminous eyes?"
"O, I see a poor moth burning
In the candle-flame," said she,
Its wings and legs are turning
To a cinder rapidly."
"Moths fly in from the heather,"
He said, "now the days decline."
"I know," said she. "The weather,
I hope, will at last be fine.
"I think," she added lightly,
"I'll look out at the door.
The ring the moon wears nightly
May be visible now no more."
She rose, and, little heeding,
Her husband then went on
With his attentive reading
In the annals of ages gone.
Outside the house a figure
Came from the tumulus near,
And speedily waxed bigger,
And clasped and called her Dear.

"I saw the pale-winged token
You sent through the crack," sighed she.
"That moth is burnt and broken
With which you lured out me.
"And were I as the moth is
It might be better far
For one whose marriage troth is
Shattered as potsherds are!"
Then grinned the Ancient Briton
From the tumulus treed with pine:
"So, hearts are thwartly smitten
In these days as in mine!"

SEEN BY THE WAITS

Through snowy woods and shady
We went to play a tune
To the lonely manor-lady
By the light of the Christmas moon.
We violed till, upward glancing
To where a mirror leaned,
We saw her airily dancing,
Deeming her movements screened;
Dancing alone in the room there,
Thin-draped in her robe of night;
Her postures, glassed in the gloom there,
Were a strange phantasmal sight.
She had learnt (we heard when homing)
That her roving spouse was dead;
Why she had danced in the gloaming
We thought, but never said.

THE TWO SOLDIERS

Just at the corner of the wall
We met — yes, he and I -
Who had not faced in camp or hall
Since we bade home good-bye,
And what once happened came back — all -
Out of those years gone by.

And that strange woman whom we knew
And loved — long dead and gone,
Whose poor half-perished residue,
Tombless and trod, lay yon!
But at this moment to our view
Rose like a phantom wan.
And in his fixed face I could see,
Lit by a lurid shine,
The drama re-enact which she
Had dyed incarnadine
For us, and more. And doubtless he
Beheld it too in mine.
A start, as at one slightly known,
And with an indifferent air
We passed, without a sign being shown
That, as it real were,
A memory-acted scene had thrown
Its tragic shadow there.

THE DEATH OF REGRET

I opened my shutter at sunrise,
And looked at the hill hard by,
And I heartily grieved for the comrade
Who wandered up there to die.
I let in the morn on the morrow,
And failed not to think of him then,
As he trod up that rise in the twilight,
And never came down again.
I undid the shutter a week thence,
But not until after I'd turned
Did I call back his last departure
By the upland there discerned.
Uncovering the casement long later,
I bent to my toil till the gray,
When I said to myself, "Ah — what ails me,
To forget him all the day!"
As daily I flung back the shutter
In the same blank bald routine,
He scarcely once rose to remembrance
Through a month of my facing the scene.

And ah, seldom now do I ponder
At the window as heretofore
On the long valued one who died yonder,
And wastes by the sycamore.

IN THE DAYS OF CRINOLINE

A plain tilt-bonnet on her head
She took the path across the leaze.
- Her spouse the vicar, gardening, said,
"Too dowdy that, for coquetries,
So I can hoe at ease.
But when she had passed into the heath,
And gained the wood beyond the flat,
She raised her skirts, and from beneath
Unpinned and drew as from a sheath
An ostrich-feathered hat.
And where the hat had hung she now
Concealed and pinned the dowdy hood,
And set the hat upon her brow,
And thus emerging from the wood
Tripped on in jaunty mood.
The sun was low and crimson-faced
As two came that way from the town,
And plunged into the wood untraced . . .
When separately therefrom they paced
The sun had quite gone down.
The hat and feather disappeared,
The dowdy hood again was donned,
And in the gloom the fair one neared
Her home and husband dour, who conned
Calmly his blue-eyed blonde.
"To-day," he said, "you have shown good sense,
A dress so modest and so meek
Should always deck your goings hence
Alone." And as a recompense
He kissed her on the cheek.

THE ROMAN GRAVEMOUNDS

By Rome's dim relics there walks a man,
Eyes bent; and he carries a basket and spade;
I guess what impels him to scrape and scan;
Yea, his dreams of that Empire long decayed.
"Vast was Rome," he must muse, "in the world's regard,
Vast it looms there still, vast it ever will be;"
And he stoops as to dig and unmine some shard
Left by those who are held in such memory.
But no; in his basket, see, he has brought
A little white furred thing, stiff of limb,
Whose life never won from the world a thought;
It is this, and not Rome, that is moving him.
And to make it a grave he has come to the spot,
And he delves in the ancient dead's long home;
Their fames, their achievements, the man knows not;
The furred thing is all to him — nothing Rome!
"Here say you that Caesar's warriors lie? -
But my little white cat was my only friend!
Could she but live, might the record die
Of Caesar, his legions, his aims, his end!"
Well, Rome's long rule here is oft and again
A theme for the sages of history,
And the small furred life was worth no one's pen;
Yet its mourner's mood has a charm for me.
November 1910.

THE WORKBOX

"See, here's the workbox, little wife,
That I made of polished oak."
He was a joiner, of village life;
She came of borough folk.
He holds the present up to her
As with a smile she nears
And answers to the profferer,
"'Twill last all my sewing years!"

"I warrant it will. And longer too.
'Tis a scantling that I got
Off poor John Wayward's coffin, who
Died of they knew not what.
"The shingled pattern that seems to cease
Against your box's rim
Continues right on in the piece
That's underground with him.
"And while I worked it made me think
Of timber's varied doom;
One inch where people eat and drink,
The next inch in a tomb.
"But why do you look so white, my dear,
And turn aside your face?
You knew not that good lad, I fear,
Though he came from your native place?"
"How could I know that good young man,
Though he came from my native town,
When he must have left there earlier than
I was a woman grown?"
"Ah no. I should have understood!
It shocked you that I gave
To you one end of a piece of wood
Whose other is in a grave?"
"Don't, dear, despise my intellect,
Mere accidental things
Of that sort never have effect
On my imaginings."
Yet still her lips were limp and wan,
Her face still held aside,
As if she had known not only John,
But known of what he died.

THE SACRILEGE

A BALLAD-TRAGEDY
(Circa 182-)
PART I

"I have a Love I love too well
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor;
I have a Love I love too well,
To whom, ere she was mine,
'Such is my love for you,' I said,
'That you shall have to hood your head
A silken kerchief crimson-red,
Wove finest of the fine.'
"And since this Love, for one mad moon,
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor,
Since this my Love for one mad moon
Did clasp me as her king,
I snatched a silk-piece red and rare
From off a stall at Priddy Fair,
For handkerchief to hood her hair
When we went gallanting.
"Full soon the four weeks neared their end
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor;
And when the four weeks neared their end,
And their swift sweets outwore,
I said, 'What shall I do to own
Those beauties bright as tulips blown,
And keep you here with me alone
As mine for evermore?'
"And as she drowsed within my van
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor -
And as she drowsed within my van,
And dawning turned to day,
She heavily raised her sloe-black eyes
And murmured back in softest wise,
'One more thing, and the charms you prize
Are yours henceforth for aye.
"'And swear I will I'll never go
While Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor
To meet the Cornish Wrestler Joe
For dance and dallyings.
If you'll to yon cathedral shrine,
And finger from the chest divine
Treasure to buy me ear-drops fine,
And richly jewelled rings.'

"I said: 'I am one who has gathered gear
From Marlbury Downs to Dunkery Tor,
Who has gathered gear for many a year
From mansion, mart and fair;
But at God's house I've stayed my hand,
Hearing within me some command -
Curbed by a law not of the land
From doing damage there.'

"Whereat she pouts, this Love of mine,
As Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor,
And still she pouts, this Love of mine,
So cityward I go.
But ere I start to do the thing,
And speed my soul's imperilling
For one who is my ravishing
And all the joy I know,

"I come to lay this charge on thee -
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor -
I come to lay this charge on thee
With solemn speech and sign:
Should things go ill, and my life pay
For botchery in this rash assay,
You are to take hers likewise — yea,
The month the law takes mine.

"For should my rival, Wrestler Joe,
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor -
My reckless rival, Wrestler Joe,
My Love's possessor be,
My tortured spirit would not rest,
But wander weary and distrest
Throughout the world in wild protest:
The thought nigh maddens me!"

PART II

Thus did he speak — this brother of mine -
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor,
Born at my birth of mother of mine,
And forthwith went his way
To dare the deed some coming night . . .
I kept the watch with shaking sight,
The moon at moments breaking bright,
At others glooming gray.

For three full days I heard no sound
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor,
I heard no sound at all around
Whether his fay prevailed,
Or one malign the master were,
Till some afoot did tidings bear
How that, for all his practised care,
He had been caught and jailed.
They had heard a crash when twelve had chimed
By Mendip east of Dunkery Tor,
When twelve had chimed and moonlight climbed;
They watched, and he was tracked
By arch and aisle and saint and knight
Of sculptured stonework sheeted white
In the cathedral's ghostly light,
And captured in the act.
Yes; for this Love he loved too well
Where Dunkery sights the Severn shore,
All for this Love he loved too well
He burst the holy bars,
Seized golden vessels from the chest
To buy her ornaments of the best,
At her ill-witchery's request
And lure of eyes like stars . . .
When blustering March confused the sky
In Toneborough Town by Exon Moor,
When blustering March confused the sky
They stretched him; and he died.
Down in the crowd where I, to see
The end of him, stood silently,
With a set face he lipped to me -
"Remember." "Ay!" I cried.
By night and day I shadowed her
From Toneborough Deane to Dunkery Tor,
I shadowed her asleep, astir,
And yet I could not bear -
Till Wrestler Joe anon began
To figure as her chosen man,
And took her to his shining van -
To doom a form so fair!

He made it handsome for her sake -
And Dunkery smiled to Exon Moor -
He made it handsome for her sake,
Painting it out and in;
And on the door of apple-green
A bright brass knocker soon was seen,
And window-curtains white and clean
For her to sit within.

And all could see she clave to him
As cleaves a cloud to Dunkery Tor,
Yea, all could see she clave to him,
And every day I said,
"A pity it seems to part those two
That hourly grow to love more true:
Yet she's the wanton woman who
Sent one to swing till dead!"

That blew to blazing all my hate,
While Dunkery frowned on Exon Moor,
And when the river swelled, her fate
Came to her pitilessly . . .
I dogged her, crying: "Across that plank
They use as bridge to reach yon bank
A coat and hat lie limp and dank;
Your goodman's, can they be?"

She paled, and went, I close behind -
And Exon frowned to Dunkery Tor,
She went, and I came up behind
And tipped the plank that bore
Her, fleetly flitting across to eye
What such might bode. She slid awry;
And from the current came a cry,
A gurgle; and no more.

How that befell no mortal knew
From Marlbury Downs to Exon Moor;
No mortal knew that deed undue
But he who schemed the crime,
Which night still covers . . . But in dream
Those ropes of hair upon the stream
He sees, and he will hear that scream
Until his judgment-time.

THE ABBEY MASON

(Inventor of the "Perpendicular" Style of Gothic Architecture)
The new-vamped Abbey shaped apace
In the fourteenth century of grace;
(The church which, at an after date,
Acquired cathedral rank and state.)
Panel and circumscribing wall
Of latest feature, trim and tall,
Rose roundabout the Norman core
In prouder pose than theretofore,
Encasing magically the old
With parpend ashlars manifold.
The trowels rang out, and tracery
Appeared where blanks had used to be.
Men toiled for pleasure more than pay,
And all went smoothly day by day,
Till, in due course, the transept part
Engrossed the master-mason's art.

- Home-coming thence he tossed and turned
  Throughout the night till the new sun burned.

"What fearful visions have inspired
These gaingivings?" his wife inquired;
"As if your tools were in your hand
You have hammered, fitted, muttered, planned;
"You have thumped as you were working hard:
I might have found me bruised and scarred.
"What then's amiss. What eating care
Looms nigh, whereof I am unaware?"
He answered not, but churchward went,
Viewing his draughts with discontent;
And fumbled there the livelong day
Till, hollow-eyed, he came away.

- 'Twas said, "The master-mason's ill!"
  And all the abbey works stood still.

Quoth Abbot Wygmore: "Why, O why
Distress yourself? You'll surely die!"
The mason answered, trouble-torn,
"This long-vogued style is quite outworn!

"The upper archmould nohow serves
To meet the lower tracery curves:
"The ogees bend too far away
To give the flexures interplay.
"This it is causes my distress . . .
So it will ever be unless
"New forms be found to supersede
The circle when occasions need.
"To carry it out I have tried and toiled,
And now perforce must own me foiled!
"Jeerers will say: 'Here was a man
Who could not end what he began!'"

- So passed that day, the next, the next;
  The abbot scanned the task, perplexed;

The townsmen mustered all their wit
To fathom how to compass it,
But no raw artistries availed
Where practice in the craft had failed . . .

- One night he tossed, all open-eyed,
  And early left his helpmeet's side.

Scattering the rushes of the floor
He wandered from the chamber door
And sought the sizing pile, whereon
Struck dimly a cadaverous dawn
Through freezing rain, that drenched the board
Of diagram-lines he last had scored -
Chalked phantasies in vain begot
To knife the architectural knot -
In front of which he dully stood,
Regarding them in hopeless mood.
He closelier looked; then looked again:
The chalk-scratched draught-board faced the rain,
Whose icicled drops deformed the lines
Innumerous of his lame designs,
So that they streamed in small white threads
From the upper segments to the heads
Of arcs below, uniting them
Each by a stalactitic stem.

- At once, with eyes that struck out sparks,
  He adds accessory cusping-marks,

Then laughs aloud. The thing was done
So long assayed from sun to sun . . .

- Now in his joy he grew aware
  Of one behind him standing there,

And, turning, saw the abbot, who
The weather's whim was watching too.
Onward to Prime the abbot went,
Tacit upon the incident.

- Men now discerned as days revolved
  The ogive riddle had been solved;

Templates were cut, fresh lines were chalked
Where lines had been defaced and balked,
And the work swelled and mounted higher,
Achievement distancing desire;
Here jambs with transoms fixed between,
Where never the like before had been -
There little mullions thinly sawn
Where meeting circles once were drawn.
"We knew," men said, "the thing would go
After his craft-wit got aglow,
"And, once fulfilled what he has designed,
We'll honour him and his great mind!"
When matters stood thus poised awhile,
And all surroundings shed a smile,
The master-mason on an eve
Homed to his wife and seemed to grieve . . .

- "The abbot spoke to me to-day:
  He hangs about the works alway.

"He knows the source as well as I
Of the new style men magnify.
"He said: 'You pride yourself too much
On your creation. Is it such?
"'Surely the hand of God it is
That conjured so, and only His! -

"'Disclosing by the frost and rain
Forms your invention chased in vain;
"'Hence the devices deemed so great
You copied, and did not create.'
"I feel the abbot's words are just,
And that all thanks renounce I must.
"Can a man welcome praise and pelf
For hatching art that hatched itself? . . .
"So, I shall own the deft design
Is Heaven's outshaping, and not mine."
"What!" said she. "Praise your works ensure
To throw away, and quite obscure
"Your beaming and beneficent star?
Better you leave things as they are!
"Why, think awhile. Had not your zest
In your loved craft curtailed your rest -
"Had you not gone there ere the day
The sun had melted all away!"

- But, though his good wife argued so,
  The mason let the people know

That not unaided sprang the thought
Whereby the glorious fane was wrought,
But that by frost when dawn was dim
The method was disclosed to him.
"Yet," said the townspeople thereat,
"'Tis your own doing, even with that!"
But he — chafed, childlike, in extremes -
The temperament of men of dreams -
Aloofly scrupled to admit
That he did aught but borrow it,
And diffidently made request
That with the abbot all should rest.

- As none could doubt the abbot's word,
  Or question what the church averred,

The mason was at length believed
Of no more count than he conceived,
And soon began to lose the fame
That late had gathered round his name . . .

• Time passed, and like a living thing
  The pile went on embodying,

And workmen died, and young ones grew,
And the old mason sank from view
And Abbots Wygmore and Staunton went
And Horton sped the embellishment.
But not till years had far progressed
Chanced it that, one day, much impressed,
Standing within the well-graced aisle,
He asked who first conceived the style;
And some decrepit sage detailed
How, when invention nought availed,
The cloud-cast waters in their whim
Came down, and gave the hint to him
Who struck each arc, and made each mould;
And how the abbot would not hold
As sole begetter him who applied
Forms the Almighty sent as guide;
And how the master lost renown,
And wore in death no artist's crown.

• Then Horton, who in inner thought
  Had more perceptions than he taught,

Replied: "Nay; art can but transmute;
Invention is not absolute;
"Things fail to spring from nought at call,
And art-beginnings most of all.
"He did but what all artists do,
Wait upon Nature for his cue."

• "Had you been here to tell them so
  Lord Abbot, sixty years ago,

"The mason, now long underground,
Doubtless a different fate had found.
"He passed into oblivion dim,
And none knew what became of him!
"His name? 'Twas of some common kind
And now has faded out of mind."
The Abbot: "It shall not be hid!
I'll trace it." . . . But he never did.

- When longer yet dank death had wormed
  The brain wherein the style had germed

From Gloucester church it flew afar -
The style called Perpendicular. -
To Winton and to Westminster
It ranged, and grew still beautifuller:
From Solway Frith to Dover Strand
Its fascinations starred the land,
Not only on cathedral walls
But upon courts and castle halls,
Till every edifice in the isle
Was patterned to no other style,
And till, long having played its part,
The curtain fell on Gothic art.

- Well: when in Wessex on your rounds,
  Take a brief step beyond its bounds,

And enter Gloucester: seek the quoin
Where choir and transept interjoin,
And, gazing at the forms there flung
Against the sky by one unsung -
The ogee arches transom-topped,
The tracery-stalks by spandrels stopped,
Petrified lacework — lightly lined
On ancient massiveness behind -
Muse that some minds so modest be
As to renounce fame's fairest fee,
(Like him who crystallized on this spot
His visionings, but lies forgot,
And many a mediaeval one
Whose symmetries salute the sun)
While others boom a baseless claim,
And upon nothing rear a name.

THE JUBILEE OF A MAGAZINE

(To the Editor)
Yes; your up-dated modern page -
All flower-fresh, as it appears -
Can claim a time-tried lineage,

That reaches backward fifty years
(Which, if but short for sleepy squires,
Is much in magazines' careers).

- Here, on your cover, never tires
  The sower, reaper, thresher, while
  As through the seasons of our sires

Each wills to work in ancient style
With seedlip, sickle, share and flail,
Though modes have since moved many a mile!
The steel-roped plough now rips the vale,
With cog and tooth the sheaves are won,
Wired wheels drum out the wheat like hail;
But if we ask, what has been done
To unify the mortal lot
Since your bright leaves first saw the sun,
Beyond mechanic furtherance — what
Advance can rightness, candour, claim?
Truth bends abashed, and answers not.
Despite your volumes' gentle aim
To straighten visions wry and wrong,
Events jar onward much the same!

- Had custom tended to prolong,
  As on your golden page engrained,
  Old processes of blade and prong,

And best invention been retained
For high crusades to lessen tears
Throughout the race, the world had gained! . . .
But too much, this, for fifty years.

THE SATIN SHOES

"If ever I walk to church to wed,
As other maidens use,
And face the gathered eyes," she said,
"I'll go in satin shoes!"
She was as fair as early day
Shining on meads unmown,
And her sweet syllables seemed to play
Like flute-notes softly blown.

The time arrived when it was meet
That she should be a bride;
The satin shoes were on her feet,
Her father was at her side.
They stood within the dairy door,
And gazed across the green;
The church loomed on the distant moor,
But rain was thick between.
"The grass-path hardly can be stepped,
The lane is like a pool!" -
Her dream is shown to be inept,
Her wish they overrule.
"To go forth shod in satin soft
A coach would be required!"
For thickest boots the shoes were doffed -
Those shoes her soul desired . . .
All day the bride, as overborne,
Was seen to brood apart,
And that the shoes had not been worn
Sat heavy on her heart.
From her wrecked dream, as months flew on,
Her thought seemed not to range.
What ails the wife?" they said anon,
"That she should be so strange?" . . .
Ah — what coach comes with furtive glide -
A coach of closed-up kind?
It comes to fetch the last year's bride,
Who wanders in her mind.
She strove with them, and fearfully ran
Stairward with one low scream:
"Nay — coax her," said the madhouse man,
"With some old household theme."
"If you will go, dear, you must fain
Put on those shoes — the pair
Meant for your marriage, which the rain
Forbade you then to wear."
She clapped her hands, flushed joyous hues;
"O yes — I'll up and ride
If I am to wear my satin shoes
And be a proper bride!"

Out then her little foot held she,
As to depart with speed;
The madhouse man smiled pleasantly
To see the wile succeed.
She turned to him when all was done,
And gave him her thin hand,
Exclaiming like an enraptured one,
"This time it will be grand!"
She mounted with a face elate,
Shut was the carriage door;
They drove her to the madhouse gate,
And she was seen no more . . .
Yet she was fair as early day
Shining on meads unmown,
And her sweet syllables seemed to play
Like flute-notes softly blown.

EXEUNT OMNES

I

Everybody else, then, going,
And I still left where the fair was? . . .
Much have I seen of neighbour loungers
Making a lusty showing,
Each now past all knowing.

II

There is an air of blankness
In the street and the littered spaces;
Thoroughfare, steeple, bridge and highway
Wizen themselves to lankness;
Kennels dribble dankness.

III

Folk all fade. And whither,
As I wait alone where the fair was?
Into the clammy and numbing night-fog
Whence they entered hither.
Soon do I follow thither!
June 2, 1913.

A POET

Attentive eyes, fantastic heed,
Assessing minds, he does not need,
Nor urgent writs to sup or dine,
Nor pledges in the roseate wine.
For loud acclaim he does not care
By the august or rich or fair,
Nor for smart pilgrims from afar,
Curious on where his hauntings are.
But soon or later, when you hear
That he has doffed this wrinkled gear,
Some evening, at the first star-ray,
Come to his graveside, pause and say:
"Whatever the message his to tell,
Two bright-souled women loved him well."
Stand and say that amid the dim:
It will be praise enough for him.
July 1914.

POSTSCRIPT "MEN WHO MARCH AWAY" (SONG OF THE SOLDIERS)

What of the faith and fire within us
Men who march away
Ere the barn-cocks say
Night is growing gray,
To hazards whence no tears can win us;
What of the faith and fire within us
Men who march away?

Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye,
Who watch us stepping by
With doubt and dolorous sigh?
Can much pondering so hoodwink you!
Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye?
Nay. We well see what we are doing,
Though some may not see -
Dalliers as they be -
England's need are we;
Her distress would leave us rueing:
Nay. We well see what we are doing,
Though some may not see!
In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just,
And that braggarts must
Surely bite the dust,
Press we to the field ungrieving,
In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just.
Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away
Ere the barn-cocks say
Night is growing gray,
To hazards whence no tears can win us:
Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away.
September 5, 1914.

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